

THE ROMAN TRAGEDIES OF THOMAS CORNEILLE

by

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SUMMARY

Apart from an eighty-year old French thesis and a recent American survey, Thomas Corneille's theatre has so far received minimal critical attention. While his comedies, derivative though they are, are not widely condemned, his tragedies are said to be complicated and over-sentimental, badly constructed and poorly versified.

This thesis attempts to present a truer picture, taking as its basis Thomas' six Roman tragedies, from La Mort de l'empereur Commode (1657) to La Mort d'Annibal (1669) and relating these to his non-Roman plays and to other major tragedies of the period. Study of Timocrate (1656) and comparison with contemporary plays and an earlier tragi-comedy show even this so-called "tragedy" to be coherent and skillfully constructed, despite the presence of mistaken identity. With the progressive disappearance of physical disguise and its replacement by hidden feeling, Thomas Corneille can concentrate on simplifying his plots, making them more truly dramatic and allowing time, as in Stilicon, for a tragic realisation of guilt. In all these fields, he noticeably alters his probable historical sources, toning down certain elements but adding new relationships and even characters to the fairly unknown ones he has chosen to treat as his major figures.

With Persée et Démétrius and Pyrrhus, less successful plays, Thomas Corneille will concentrate on and refine still further his dramatic technique, largely ignoring, as Racine does

in La Thébaine the following year, the power of amour-passion. Indeed as late as Laodice, the year after Andromaque, he will depict an ambitious grande criminelle, rational to the end, while La Mort d'Annibal, though introducing love, does so to achieve primarily dramatic ends.

Progression, activity despite dependence, humanity, even love, despite ambition: these are features of virtually all the Roman tragedies studied and, together with increasing plot simplification, they make Thomas Corneille a very important precursor of Racine. His greatest skill lies in what the frères Parfaict call "la marche du théâtre" - his plays, tense, logically constructed, well-balanced, are both tragic and truly dramatic.

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Foreword

In preparing this study, I have incurred debts to several people. The inadequacies of existing studies of Thomas Corneille will be pointed out later, but I clearly owe a lot to the work of Gustave Reynier, Carrington Lancaster and David Collins. They have all furnished a number of facts, even if at times wrong facts, and some of their opinions have served as useful points de départ for my own thoughts. On the dramaturgical side, Jacques Scherer's definitive La dramaturgie classique en France and Georges May's book on Corneille and Racine have been both useful and stimulating; I regret very much that Richard Griffiths' study of Montchrestien and sixteenth-century dramaturgy appeared only when the present work was virtually complete.

For help in providing material, some of it recondite and dusty, I have to thank the staffs of the British Museum, the National Library of Scotland, Aberdeen University Library, Edinburgh University Library, the Bibliothèque universitaire de Rennes and the Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen, but in particular the Bibliothèque Nationale and that most charming and efficient of libraries, the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

Then there are a number of people to whom I owe an especial debt. Professor Armel Diverres has given me his encouragement and constant support, Professor Roy Knight the benefit of his criticisms and advice. I must thank

Professor Alan Steele who, through his sympathetic and attentive supervision, has guided this work to its present state. But my greatest debt is to Professor Harry Barnwell, who supervised the study in its early stages and who has never ceased to provide me with insight into his great knowledge of seventeenth-century French drama. His interest and generosity have gone far beyond what duty required, and I am most grateful to him for it. Last but not least, I would thank my wife Jean, who has gallantly supported me during long hours, and without whose patience, understanding and encouragement the task could never have been completed at all.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Voyant le portrait de Corneille
Gardez-vous de crier merveille;
Et dans vos transports n'allez pas
Prendre ici Pierre pour Thomas.

(GACON)

Thomas Corneille ne s'est proposé qu'un seul but:
offrir à ses contemporains un régal dont ils
puissent jouir en toute quiétude, dans la tragédie
ce romanesque honnête qui ravira toujours les
âmes moyennes ...

(G. REYNIER)

It is only comparatively recently that seventeenth-century French literary history has managed to shake off an image of tidy conformity and reveal the period for what we now know it was: one of remarkable variety. Soothed and reassured by the confident pronouncements of the great late nineteenth-century critics, the unsuspecting modern reader thought he could fairly easily distinguish "good" authors from "bad", and treat the latter with the disdain they deserved.

Such a point of view is perhaps more naïve than false. Doubts must first have arisen with the arrival of the baroque, a conveniently elastic term which joined the equally enigmatic "classicism" and threw into the melting-pot prior notions of literary evolution and classification. If nothing else, it was now clear that seventeenth-century France had more than one literature and that it certainly occupied more than a brief moment in time, suspended in a vacuum somewhere between 1630 and the end of the century. Accepted masterpieces underwent a useful reappraisal, while forgotten

works were re-read and sometimes offered to a wider public.

As far as the theatre goes, the work of restoration is still largely incomplete. The last few years have seen scholars venturing into a new field, loosely and not very helpfully called "new criticism". Here Marxists, existentialists, phenomenologists, psychoanalysts and others - Lucien Goldmann, Marcelle Blum, Roland Barthes, Jean Starobinski, to name but a few - can rub shoulders and busily work away together. At the same time the traditional point of view - or at least the traditional approach to criticism - is vigorously upheld by a whole range of French academics mostly based in a seemingly impregnable Sorbonne. Such a wide range of opinions, and such often persuasive arguments can do nothing but good, provided that the reader is acute enough to tread a hazardous path between woolly, childish psychoanalysis, such as that of Charles Mauron, very conservative doctrine¹ and what one can only look on as highly dubious

1. R. Picard, in his book La carrière de J. Racine, Paris, 1956, and more recently in his Nouvelle critique, nouvelle imposture, Paris, 1965. Like Etiemble in the field of franglais, Picard may be damaging his own cause by excessive ridicule and by affecting an intellectual superiority stimulated by professional jealousy. His arguments, however couched, do seem to outweigh replies to his attacks such as Roland Barthes' Critique et vérité and Serge Doubrovsky's Pourquoi la nouvelle critique. Critique et objectivité (both Paris, 1966).

interpretations².

Yet this renewal of critical interest hardly goes beyond the three great names of the classical theatre, particularly Pierre Corneille and Racine. As far as merely talented men go, the privileges accorded to a genius are not yet theirs. It is true that, over the past few years, following upon the rediscovery of Etienne Jodelle and Robert Garnier, new monographs have appeared in defence of certain secondary authors³. When these effectively counter the erroneous opinions and the prejudices of earlier criticism, one can measure their usefulness. But would it be unfair to claim that, for a large part of our knowledge of the byways of the French Classical theatre, we still

2. Georges Couton believes he can detect in Corneille's theatre allusions to the history or politics of seventeenth-century France. But apart from the admission in the Au Lecteur (1668) to Attila: "...C'est ce qui m'a enhardi à la faire (Ildione) soeur d'un de nos premiers rois, afin d'opposer la France naissante au déclin de l'empire", there is no further evidence to support this. Cf. W. Krauss, Corneille als politischer Dichter, Marburg, 1936. Equally, Bernard Weinberg's approach to Racine in his The art of Jean Racine, Chicago, 1963, seems misguided.
3. For example, on Rotrou the studies of Francesco Orlando, Rotrou dalla tragicommedia alla tragedia, Turin, 1963; Jacqueline van Baelen, Rotrou, le héros tragique et la révolte, Paris, 1965; Jacques Morel, Jean Rotrou, dramaturge de l'ambiguïté, Paris, 1968 and R.J. Nelson, Immanence and transcendence: the theater of Jean Rotrou (1609-1650), Columbus, 1969, as well as articles by Judd Hubert and W. Leiner. On Tristan, Daniela Dalla Valle's book Il teatro di Tristan l'Hermite. Saggio storico e critico, Turin, 1964; on Cyrano de Bergerac, Georges Mongrédien's Cyrano de Bergerac, Paris, 1964, and V. Ramos' Cyrano, auteur tragique, Sao Paulo, 1966, as well as, on the comedies, H.C. Knutson's The ironic game, Berkeley, 1966, etc.

have to depend too heavily on the studies by Charles Arnaud on d'Aubignac theorist and dramatist (1887), by Harmand on Brébeuf (1897), by Hausding on Campistron (1903), by Boissière on Chevreau (1909), by Schultz on Magnon (1912), by Bizos (1877) and Dannheisser (1888) on Mairet, by Batereau on Georges de Scudéry (1902) - all precious volumes now classified as "very rare" in second-hand book catalogues. Yet all these monographs are dated, both in information and approach⁴. In this field there is much still to be done, as regards both long-forgotten authors⁵ and a literary synthesis such as only a proper and sympathetic history of minor seventeenth century French drama could hope to provide.

The present work has no intention of being a panegyric or a forced rehabilitation. There would be little point in so praising Thomas Corneille's merits that one remained oblivious to his many and obvious defects. But on what evidence can the modern reader, anxious to work his way into the life and writings of the great Corneille's brother, base his critical judgements? As so often in seventeenth-century literary studies, the first serious approach to the problem was made at the end of last century, when Gustave Reynier presented his thesis on Thomas Corneille, still the only book in French devoted to him. Reynier's work, now almost

4. See my bibliography for details.

5. What about, for example, Gillet de la Tessonnerie, *La Calprenède*, Michel Le Clerc?

eighty years old, suffers from an arbitrary and rigid classification of the plays, and contains many blatant errors. On page 151, for example, the author's assertion, when discussing Stilicon, that "Thomas Corneille n'a presque rien eu à ajouter à l'histoire" is clearly ridiculous, as we shall see. Astonishing as it may seem, we had to wait until 1958 and the publication in the United States of a study devoted to minor seventeenth-century French authors, for errors to be pointed out in Reynier's discussion of even such a well-known (or should it be little-read, if oft-quoted) play as Ariane⁶. The same American critic systematically demolishes the arguments of Jules Lemaitre and Daniel Mornet, for he finds in their studies on Racine a series of equally false interpretations of the famous Thomas Corneille play Timocrate (1656). In the case of Lemaitre, Lockert can assert that the French critic has limited himself to a hasty scanning of Reynier's book without bothering to read the text of the play itself; and a similar judgement could be passed on even Mornet's Histoire de la littérature française classique, where the author (pp. 226-227) has clearly not read Persée et Démétrius.

To put matters at their lowest level, such cavalier treatment of even simple, well-established facts can be summed up in two recent references. Firstly there is

6. L. Lockert, Studies in French-classical tragedy, Nashville, 1958, pp. 15-18. Lockert also points out Reynier's errors in the treatment of Le Comte d'Essex.

Gustave Michaut's entry on Thomas Corneille in Cardinal Grente's admirable Dictionnaire des lettres francaises: dix-septième siècle. Here the eminent Sorbonne professor a) manages to both misspell Reynier's name and get the date of publication of his work wrong; b) gives a wrong initial to Aaron Schaffer, author of an article on Le Festin de Pierre; c) makes Thomas Corneille die two months earlier than he did; d) says that the two brothers "ne se séparèrent jamais" (almost certainly untrue for the period between the move to Paris in 1662 and Pierre's death 22 years later); e) offers a woefully incomplete catalogue of Thomas' plays, in a list which is obviously intended to be complete; f) furnishes first performance dates for, among others, Pyrrhus, Le Festin de Pierre and Le Comte d'Essex which are and were, in 1954 and even in Reynier's day, wrong; and g) thinks that the founder of the Mercure galant, on which Thomas later collaborated, was a certain gentleman called Viré⁷. Secondly, in the Bibliothèque Nationale catalogue of the Racine exhibition held to mark the tercentenary of Andromaque, mention is made of Thomas Corneille's Bérénice in the section devoted to plays on the theme of Racine's 1670 tragedy. The note to the displayed copy of Thomas Corneille's Bérénice runs: "Il est intéres-

7. Paris, 1954, pp. 306-307. The majority of those called upon to talk of Thomas Corneille also misquote the title of Reynier's book, among the latest offenders being Antoine Adam in his L'Age classique, Paris, vol. I (1968), p. 301 ~~and vol. II (1969), p. 226~~ - transcribing the error already contained in, for example, his Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle, Paris, vol. II, (1951), p. 339, note 2.

sant de noter à propos de cette tragédie de Thomas Corneille, avant d'aborder le fameux problème des deux Bérénices de Racine et de Pierre Corneille en 1670, que le sujet de Bérénice a été traité par les deux frères Corneille dont on sait qu'ils étaient unis d'une amitié 'qu'aucun intérêt, non pas même aucune émulation pour la gloire, n'a pu altérer.' (Discours de Racine à la réception de Thomas Corneille à l'Académie, 1685)"⁸. This would indeed be a fascinating parallel, were Thomas' and Pierre's plays dealing with the same subject ...

Apart from Thomas Corneille, sa vie et son théâtre, then, there has been virtually no attempt to evaluate our author's real merit. Some forty years after Reynier, there appeared in Baltimore H.C. Lancaster's monumental source-book which, in its survey of the classical theatre, devotes several pages to the younger Corneille. However indispensable this precious work may be, it clearly does not claim to provide full and coherent criticism of all plays, even the greatest. On questions of detail, Lancaster's authority is supreme; but his book necessarily lacks an overall view which alone would allow appreciation of the relative merit of each author.

The only other study of any importance is rather disappointing. This is David A. Collins' Brown University dissertation Thomas Corneille: protean dramatist, published in 1966 by Mouton at The Hague. As its title might suggest,

8. Bibliothèque Nationale, Jean Racine, Paris, 1967, p. 42, item 159.

the work is fairly general and tries, in less than two hundred pages, to deal with almost forty plays by Thomas Corneille - a task not made any easier by a dearth of new ideas and a slavish reproduction of data and judgements from Reynier and Lancaster. Even when deliberately setting out to avoid the former's categories "tragédies romanesques", "tragédies cornéliennes", tragédies raciniennes" and so on, he ends up with what is in many respects an equally rigid system⁹.

Finally, in 1961, Patrick Cox presented an Exeter University doctoral thesis under the title "The comedies of Thomas Corneille, 1649-1677". This is a more thorough study than the American one, but it is not always successful in its attempt to examine the plays in the light of "seventeenth-century taste".

It is on this slim bibliographical foundation, then, on these at times patently false judgements that present appreciation of Thomas Corneille precariously rests. Even examination of individual plays has been neglected, with the exception of articles by André Marie on Le Geôlier de soi-même, by Hobohm and Michaelis on Le Galant doublé, by Privitera on La Comtesse d'Orgueil, by Schaffer on Le Festin de Pierre, and finally by Lacy Lockert on certain of the tragedies. Much remains to be done, even if only in a strictly negative way, by removing a lot of dead wood and allowing the healthy trees to be examined, the plays that deserve recognition to be seen.

9. Collins' four main chapters are entitled "Apprenticeship in comedy", "The romanesque identity plays", "The Cornelian tragedies", "The tragedies of feeling".

In order to judge the part that Thomas Corneille played in French classical theatre, one has to adopt rather stricter criteria. The position he occupied in his century was a central one, for he was a contemporary of Molière the dramatist, and yet actively productive during the last creative years of P. Corneille and throughout Racine's career. His early years as a writer witnessed the passing of several potential rivals: Rotrou dies in 1650, Cyrano and Tristan in 1655 and Du Ryer at the end of 1658. To realise the great popularity of Thomas' plays, the reader has only to examine a bibliography of editions of his complete works, his selected works (usually incorporated into a Théâtre de P. Corneille) and his individual plays.

By using only six sources to establish a rough list of editions of his OEuvres choisies, the popularity of certain plays of Thomas Corneille in the first half of the nineteenth century, especially between 1820 and 1840, is readily established. From details provided by the catalogues of the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, the British Museum, the Library of Congress, the Bibliothèque municipale in Rouen and by the Bibliographie cornélienne of Picot, added to by Le Verdier and Pelay, one can arrive at the following totals:

Editions of Th. Corneille, Oeuvres choisies

1750-1754 :)	1	1800-1804 :	3	1850-1854 :	5
1755-1759 :)		1805-1809 :	2	1855-1859 :	4
1760-1764 :	2	1810-1814 :	5	1860-1864 :	2
1765-1769 :	1	1815-1819 :	3	1865-1869 :	1
1770-1774 :	4	1820-1824 :	8	1870-1874 :	2
1775-1779 :	0	1825-1829 :	7	1875-1879 :	1
1780-1784 :	3	1830-1834 :	7	1880-1884 :)	1
1785-1789 :	4	1835-1839 :	7	1885-1889 :)	
1790-1794 :	1	1840-1844 :	4		
1795-1799 :	0	1845-1849 :	3	<u>1750-1889</u> total	81

The number of partial and complete editions of Thomas Corneille is in fact considerable. Yet the last so-called complete edition is already ninety years old, and Lintilhac, in the third volume of his Histoire générale du théâtre en France, is right to point out its inadequacies. The only modern editions of individual plays avoid the main tragedies: L'Amour à la mode, a popular, unannotated edition incorporated into Louis van Renynghe de Voxvrie's curious compilation Descendance de Thomas Corneille (1959), the pastorate burlesque Le Berger extravagant, published in 1960 by Francis Bar in the Textes littéraires français series and Yves Giraud's edition of Timocrate in the same collection (1970). In addition, Mlle Colette Cosnier prepared a critical edition of L'Amour à la mode for her thèse de 3e cycle sustained at Rennes in 1964, but this edition has not yet been published. While Bar offers little in the way of new information or substantial introductory material, Giraud provides a fair introduction to the 1656 'tragedy', putting to good use the latest scholarship on dating and sources. But even this edition, the fruits of a Fribourg seminar course, fails to

do more than hint at the really dramatic nature of this amazingly successful play. Section V of the introduction, devoted to "l'argument et l'intrigue", offers a useful plot-summary but little idea of the richness and subtle complexities of the construction, with which I deal in a later chapter.

In addition to publication and subsequent reprinting, an author's reputation rests largely with the critics, professional and amateur. In the middle of last century, the adjudicator of a competition run to honour Thomas Corneille's memory confidently addressed the following words to the Académie des Sciences, belles-lettres et arts de Rouen:

Quoi qu'il en soit, Thomas Corneille sera sans doute longtemps encore le sujet de plus d'une étude biographique, grammaticale ou littéraire. Son nom, sa vie et son talent appelleront toujours les regards de la critique qui voudra approfondir l'histoire du théâtre français, et par des considérations de toute sorte on pourra chercher à jeter¹⁰ de la lumière sur son mérite, son esprit et ses œuvres.

If full biographical and grammatical studies have still not been written¹¹, appreciation of Thomas Corneille's talent and writings is equally lacking. The same worthy Academician

10. Delzons, Rapport sur le concours pour l'éloge de Thomas Corneille, lu à la séance publique du 8 août, 1851, in Précis analytique des travaux de l'Académie des Sciences, Belles-lettres et Arts de Rouen (Mémoires de l'Académie de Rouen) pendant l'année 1850-1851, Rouen, 1851, p.297.
11. G. Sautebin's Thomas Corneille grammairien, Berne, 1897, is devoted to a study of notes added by Th. Corneille to his critical edition of Vaugelas' Remarques, 1687.

did the younger Corneille's cause no good when he summed up the main features of his tragedies in these terms:

Il n'est guère de tragédie de Thomas Corneille où l'on ne trouve un inconnu, un personnage que l'on croyait mort, et qui reparaît tout-à-coup pour rompre une intrigue ou arranger un dénouement, une princesse qui est recherchée par plusieurs amants à la fois, un héros dont deux ou trois rivaux se disputent le coeur. L'amour y est le premier soin et souvent l'unique affaire des personnages principaux: mais un amour mêlé de tant de chimères, et compliqué de tant d'obstacles, que tout y semble impossible et surnaturel. Ce sont partout des héroïnes amoureuses, qui mettent leur gloire à ne pas avouer leur amour, et à le soumettre non à leur devoir mais à leur dignité et à leur orgueil; des princes qui abandonnent leurs états, ou qui se déguisent et cachent leur nom, pour entreprendre plus hardiment la conquête d'un coeur qu'ils poursuivent. Tous les jeux et les caprices de l'amour et du hasard unis ensemble sont le fonds habituel de ces actions plus singulières qu'intéressantes qui tourmentent ou amusent l'esprit plus qu'elles ne l'agitent et ne le touchent, et où la vérité des caractères, des moeurs et des situations est pour ainsi dire inconnue¹²

Faint, brief praise indeed - and at times an inaccurate account of a talent which, in tragedy at least, was not so strictly limited either in choice of subject-matter or in character portrayal. Yet this legend has come down almost unaltered, encouraged by Reynier's well-meaning but inadequate classification and largely accepted unquestioningly by the handful of later critics who have shown interest in the question. How then are we to explain (or explain away?) the praises heaped on Thomas Corneille during his lifetime and during the eighteenth century in France? However unreliable immediate interpretation and appreciation of one's contemporaries may be, should no notice be taken of the opinions - both favourable and critical - of

12. Delzons, *ibid.*, pp. 291-292.

those who have known an author? At the very least we must recognise that contemporary judgements tell us much about public taste at the time - and no one has yet successfully disputed the idea that Thomas Corneille's Timocrate was given the most enthusiastic public reception of any play in seventeenth-century France.

The uncompromising critics first, then, and in particular Chapelain, Boileau and La Harpe. In his quaint Mémoire de quelques gens de lettres vivans en 1662, published, it is true, at a time when Racine's plays had not yet tarnished the glory of Pierre Corneille and when Thomas' talent was not fully apparent in all its diversity, the author of the Sentiments de l'Académie Française sur le Cid praises the dramatist he had criticised only twenty-five years earlier, and speaks kindly of Boyer, "qui ne cède qu'au seul Corneille", as well as of Chevreau who "peut tenir le premier rang parmi les seconds". But he looks with indifference on Molière's literary production, on that of Quinault, too, "poète sans fond et sans art", while Thomas Corneille, "à force de vouloir surpasser son aîné, tombe fort au-dessous de lui et son élévation le rend obscur sans le rendre grave"¹³.

Later, Monchesnay reports in the Bolaeana a conversation which he had with Boileau:

Je demandois à Monsieur Despréaux ce qu'il pensoit de

13. J. Chapelain, Mémoire de quelques gens de lettres vivans en 1662, dressé par ordre de M. Colbert, in J.-E. Fidaio-Justiniani, L'esprit classique et la préciosité, Paris, 1914, pp. 198, 199, 203.

Thomas Corneille, frere du fameux Poëte de ce nom. C'est un homme, disoit-il, emporté de l'enthousiasme d'autrui, & qui n'a jamais pu rien faire de raisonnable: Vous diriez qu'il ne s'est étudié qu'à copier les défauts de son frere, Decipit exemplar vitiis imitabile ...

... Ah! pauvre Thomas, continuoît Monsieur Despréaux, tes vers comparés avec ceux de ton frere aîné font bien voir que tu n'es qu'un cadet de Normandie¹⁴.

The compliment is hardly a flattering one if we remember the all too famous epigram: "Après l'Agésilas / Hélas!" or the criticisms which the same Boileau makes of Pierre Corneille in the third chant of his Art poétique.

More than a century after this, in his Lycée, ou cours de littérature ancienne et moderne, La Harpe will launch a pitiless attack on all aspects of Thomas Corneille's work. We shall see later how he misunderstands plays like

14. J. Losme de Monchesnay, Bolaeana, Amsterdam, Lhonoré, 1742, pp. 129-130. Cf. in 1663 the abbé d'Aubignac, Dissertation ... sur ... Sertorius (in F. Granet, Recueil de dissertations sur plusieurs tragédies de Corneille et de Racine, Paris, 1740, vol. I, p. 220): Th. Corneille is "considéré comme un apprentif qui travaille encore sur la besogne que le maître lui taille". The same year Donneau de Visé replies in his Défense du Sertorius de M. de Corneille, Paris, Barbin, 1663, pp. 7-9: "Vous sortez de vostre sujet, pour répandre vostre fiel sur Monsieur de Corneille le ieune; & comme il a beaucoup de merite, il n'est pas exempt de vos iniures. C'est par là que l'on connoist clairement que l'ennui vous fait ouvrir la bouche, puisque sans nécessité vous luy dites des choses aussi ridicules que piquantes, & qui font que l'on a pitié de vous. A quoy songiez-vous, lors que vous laissastes déborder vostre venin contre luy? ... Que vous auriez de vanité, Monsieur d'Aubignac, si vous estiez autant estimé que ce ieune Corneille, que vostre incivilité & vostre rage vous empeschent de nommer Monsieur! Nous auons veu plusieurs Ouvrages de luy, qui ont eu l'applaudissement de toute la France! Timocrate, Commode, Stilicon & Camma parlent en sa faueur; & l'on ne doute point que la reputation qu'ils luy ont acquise, ne vous ait fait mal à la teste, puis que c'est cette seule reputation des Grands hommes qui vous met en si mauuaise humeur."

Stilicon and Camma; in more general terms he writes thus:

Des fadeurs amoureuses, des raisonnemens entortillés, un héroïsme alembiqué, une monotonie de tournures froidement sententieuses, une diffusion insupportable, une versification flasque et incorrecte, telle est la manière de Thomas Corneille: il y⁵a peu d'auteurs dont la lecture soit plus rebutante⁵.

These last two critics are known for their idea of a conservative classicism. How does Racine, so appreciated by Boileau, himself react to the efforts of his former rival's younger brother? When all is said and done, his remarks go no further than conventional platitudes, at best they suggest a touch of irony. His speech in praise of the late Pierre Corneille, delivered when Thomas is received into the Académie Française on 2 January 1685, hardly mentions the literary activities of the new academician.

Vous auriez pu bien mieux que moi, Monsieur, lui rendre ici les justes honneurs qu'il (P. Corneille) mérite, si vous n'eussiez peut-être appréhendé avec raison qu'en faisant l'éloge d'un frère, avec qui vous avez d'ailleurs tant de conformité, il ne semblât que vous faisiez votre propre éloge. C'est cette conformité que nous avons tous eue en vue lorsque tout d'une voix nous vous avons appelé pour remplir sa place, persuadés que nous sommes que nous retrouverons en vous, non seulement son nom, son même esprit, son même enthousiasme, mais encore sa même modestie, sa même vertu, son même zèle pour l'Académie¹⁶.

Some two and a half years later, in a letter of 5 September

15. La Harpe, Lycée, ou Cours de littérature ancienne et moderne, Paris, Agasse, an VII, vol. V, p. 317.
16. Racine, Discours prononcé à l'Académie Française à la réception de MM de Corneille et de Bergeret, le deuxième janvier 1685, in Oeuvres complètes, ed. R. Picard, Paris, 1960, vol. II, p. 347.

1687 to Boileau, Racine acknowledges receipt of Thomas' new study on Vaugelas. "Ce sont les Remarques de M. de Vaugelas, avec les notes de Thomas Corneille. Cela est ainsi affiché dans Paris depuis quatre jours. Auriez-vous jamais cru voir ensemble M. de Vaugelas et M. de Corneille le jeune donnant des règles sur la langue?"¹⁷

Thomas' successor among the Immortals, Houdart de La Motte, praised his gift for plot-construction, but commented on the excessive haste with which he wrote his plays:

Né avec un goût universel, il connoissoit également les beautés de l'une et de l'autre scène; la France le comptera toujours entre ses Sophocles & ses Menandres. Capable du grand, il mérita plus d'une fois la noble ... jalousie de son frère qui eut la générosité de le lui avouer.

... Ce qui le distingue dans les deux genres, c'est qu'il y posséda souverainement le don de l'intrigue & des situations; peut-être ne connoitroit-il point de Maître au théâtre, si sa féconde facilité, si la foule de ses grands desseins lui eût laissé le soin scrupuleux du détail¹⁸.

In the panegyric which he wrote a few months after Thomas' death in 1709, De Boze is generous with his praise of the late member of the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres. "Outre que Pierre Corneille étoit de vingt ans plus âgé que son frère, il y avoit entre eux la plus parfaite union que l'on puisse imaginer; union qui

17. Ibid., p. 492.

18. (Houdart de La Motte), Discours prononcé dans l'Académie Française le samedi huitième Février MDCCX à la réception de Monsieur Houdart de la Motte, Paris Coignard, 1710, pp. 15-16.

les a quelquefois confondus aux yeux de leurs contemporains, et qui imposera d'autant plus à la postérité, qu'elle aura de nouveaux sujets de s'y méprendre"¹⁹. Voltaire echoes these remarks when he calls the younger Corneille "le seul de son temps qui fût digne d'être le premier au-dessous de son frère"²⁰. The frères Parfaict are no doubt more realistic when they separate Thomas' dramaturgy from his versification:

On ne peut que souscrire à tous les éloges donnés à M. Corneille de Lisle; mais parlons de ses Ouvrages Dramatiques. Cet Auteur entendoit parfaitement le théâtre; ses plans sont presque tous bien imaginés, & bien rendus; les caracteres de ses Personnages assez soutenus, & la marche du théâtre admirable; mais sa versification dégrade toutes ces beautés; elle est foible, tortillée, pleine de répétitions et de choses inutiles, & souvent de galimathias ...²¹

This same important point - the quality of Thomas' skill as a dramatist, as a constructor of plots - is made by three other eighteenth-century figures, Titon du Tillet, Destouches and Fontenelle. Titon du Tillet, in his Parnasse françois of 1732, mentions Thomas Corneille's prodigious memory - a fact also commented upon by de Visé in the 1710 Mercurie galant obituary - and his knowledge of French poetic practice, and then continues (p. 383): "Il sçavoit parfaite-

19. De Boze, Eloge de Thomas Corneille prononcé dans l'Académie royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, à la rentrée publique d'après Pâques 1710, in Oeuvres de Thomas Corneille, Paris, A.-A. Renouard, 1817, p. 60.
20. Voltaire, Remarques sur "Ariane", in Oeuvres complètes, ed. L. Moland, Paris, 1877-1885, vol. XXXII, p. 305.
21. F. and C. Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, Paris, 1745-1749, vol. VIII, p. 363.

ment les regles du Théâtre; & aucun de nos Poëtes Dramatiques n'a mieux entendu que lui ce qu'on appelle le plan & la conduite d'une Piece". The dramatist Destouches, in one of his letters to the chevalier de B***, states:

Je suis fort avancé dans mes observations sur les deux Corneilles, dont le cadet, plus je le sonde et l'examine, me paroît infiniment plus estimable qu'on ne se l' imagine ordinairement, sur-tout par rapport à l'invention & à la disposition des sujets. Jamais homme, à mon avis, n'a mieux possédé l'art de bien conduire une Pièce de Théâtre²².

Fontenelle, the Corneilles' nephew, writing to the Journal des Savants in 1741, makes the distinction even plainer. Boileau had criticised two of Thomas Corneille's more quotable lines ("Le crime fait la honte, et non pas l' échafaud" and "Je la tue, et c'est vous qui me le faites faire"), whereupon Fontenelle leaps to the defence of his uncle:

La vraye Poësie d'une Pièce de Théâtre, c'est toute la constitution inventée & créée, les Vers n'en sont qu' un ornement, quoique d'un grand prix, & Polyeucte ou Cinna en prose seroient encore d'admirables productions d'un Poëte. M. Despréaux ne l'est point à cet égard ... M. (Thomas) Corneille au contraire étoit plus grand Poëte que Versificateur. Je ne crains point de dire, après tous ceux qui ont porté leur vûë du côté de l'Art du Théâtre, qu'on lui en découvre plus qu'à son aîné même, & que sur ce point son exemple est plus instructif. On avoue qu'en général il a trop négligé la versification, il figurera, si l'on veut, avec le Poussin, excellent dans la composition & l'ordonnance de ses Tableaux, mais foible dans la partie du Coloris.

... Il (Boileau) n'a compté pour rien un grand nombre de Tragédies, telles que Stilicon, Camma, Maximien, Antiochus, Laodice, Ariane, le Comte d'Essex &c, & de

22. Destouches, Suite de la Cinquiesme (sic, for: troisième) Lettre à Monsieur le Chevalier de B***, in Oeuvres de Monsieur Destouches ... Nouvelle édition, Amsterdam and Leipzig, Arkstée & Merkus, MDCCLV, Vol. IV, p. 46. The remarks he mentions have never been published.

comédies, comme D. Bertrand de Cigral, Le Baron d'Albigrac, l'Inconnu, &c, Pièces dont quelques-unes subsistent encore au Théâtre avec applaudissement, il n'a pas senti la (*sic*) mérite singulier de ces Pièces-là par la conduite qui y regne, non pas même celui qu'elles ont quelquefois par de beaux morceaux de versification qu'il seroit aisé de montrer ...²³.

The same year, Voltaire, writing to Jean-Baptiste Nicolas Formont, comments on Fontenelle's defence of his uncle, adding bitinglly: "C'est une grande erreur, il me semble, de croire les pièces de ce Thomas bien conduites parce qu'elles sont fort intriguées. Ce n'est pas assez d'une intrigue, il la faut intéressante, il la faut tragique; il ne la faut pas compliquée, sans quoi il n'y a plus de place pour les beaux vers, pour les portraits, pour les sentiments, pour les passions. Aussi ne peut on retenir par coeur vingt vers de ce cadet qui est partant un homme médiocre en poésie aussi bien que son cher neveu, d'ailleurs homme d'un mérite très étendu ..."²⁴.

And so we reach the modern period, with Reynier's condemnation: Thomas Corneille did not think about posterity, and posterity is right in not thinking about him. For, he adds, "Thomas Corneille, comme beaucoup d'auteurs de son temps, pensait que les pièces sont faites pour être écoutées plutôt que pour être lues"²⁵. Such an attitude,

23. Journal des Savants, May 1741, pp. 266-267.

24. Voltaire to Jean-Baptiste Nicolas Formont, in Voltaire's Correspondence, ed. T. Besterman, Geneva, 1953-1965, vol. XI, p. 180 (letter 2364, dated 10 August 1741).

25. G. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, sa vie et son théâtre, Paris, 1892, pp. 323, 327.

if true, is not deserving of condescension, and certainly not of scorn. Is a dramatist's first duty not, in fact, to write plays which can hold their own on stage? The hunt for "beaux vers", which a Racinian scholar like Professor Eugène Vinaver engages in, can only be justified after a thorough examination and true appreciation of the structural patterns of a play²⁶.

The time has come, it seems to me, to have a long, hard look at Thomas Corneille's dramatic skills, judging them as independently as one can and rejecting preconceived ideas and literary hearsay. For example, we should not, I would suggest, pay too much attention to a passage from Thomas' Discours to the Académie Française in 1685 when, speaking of his late brother, he states: "J'ai sans doute à rougir d'avoir si mal profité de tant de leçons que j'ai reçues de sa propre bouche, par cette pratique continuelle qui me donnoit avec lui la plus parfaite union qu'on ait jamais vûe entre deux frères ..."²⁷. Racine's praise of Pierre and Thomas was equally flattering on the

26. E. Vinaver, Racine et la poésie tragique, Paris, 1951 and 1963. Cf. his L'action poétique dans le théâtre de Racine, Oxford, 1960 (The Zarahoff Lecture for 1960). The term "poème dramatique" was frequently used in the seventeenth century to designate a tragedy. The adjective here should not be forgotten ...

27. T. Corneille, Discours prononcé le 2 janvier 1685 par Monsieur Thomas Corneille lorsqu'il fût reçu à l'Académie Française, à la place de M. Pierre Corneille son frere, in Poèmes dramatiques de T. Corneille, Paris, Veuve Gandouin, 1758, vol. V, p. 573.

same important occasion, and we must look sceptically on the picturesque idea of close collaboration between the two brothers, so dear to the hearts of Romantic engravers. In the prefaces to his early comedies, Thomas admits that he has followed his Spanish sources carefully; and with Le Charme de la voix in 1656 he attributes failure to an over-slavish adherence to Moreto's original.

Much of the trouble about judging a seventeenth-century writer's reputation, now or even more so among his contemporaries, stems from the particular circumstances surrounding the written or spoken views expressed. Racine, as directeur of the Académie Française in 1685, must both praise its recently lost member Pierre Corneille and give a suitable welcome to his successor, Thomas Corneille, elected after long efforts to gain admission and despite the presence of another candidate, the teen-age duc du Maine, apparently supported by Racine²⁸. On the other hand criticism such as that implicit in Chrysalde's remarks about "le nom pompeux" of "monsieur de l'Isle", in the opening scene of L'Ecole des femmes, should not be exaggerated. Pierre received even more scathing comment ten months earlier (February 1662) when, in the Avertissement to Le Fâcheux, Molière writes that "je ne desespere pas de faire voir un jour, en grand Auteur, que je puis citer Aristote et Horace". This apparent quarrel between

28. Nouvelles de la République des Lettres, January 1685, in R. Picard (ed.), Corpus Racinianum, Paris, 1956, pp. 140-141.

Molière and the Corneilles is no doubt an aftermath of the former's visit to Rouen in 1658 and is partly reflected in Thomas' correspondence, especially in a letter of 1 December 1659 sent to the abbé de Pure, where the younger brother states: "J'ay eu bien de la Joye en ce que vous auez escrit d'Oreste et de Pilade, et suis fasché en mesme temps que la haute opinion que Mr de Cleville auoit du jeu de Mrs de Bourbon n'ait pas esté remplie aduantageusement pour luy. Tout le monde dit qu'ils ont joué detestablement sa pièce, et le grand monde qu'ils ont eu a leur farce des pretieuses apres l'auoir quittée, fait bien cognoistre qu'ils ne sont propres qu'a soustenir de semblables bagatelles et que la plus forte piece tomberoit entre leurs mains"²⁹.

Even a perceptive and kindly critic like the late Louis Herland, in his little book on Pierre Corneille, sees Thomas only as a rather insignificant hack basking in his brother's reflected glory. "Peu ou point de témoignages sur Thomas; mais on entrevoit assez bien, à travers sa prodigieuse et facile fécondité, une sorte de Sacha Guitry du XVIIe siècle, esprit vif et superficiel, bon coeur et beaucoup d'entregent, adroit à se glisser dans le sillage de l'aîné, adroit à prendre le vent et à exploiter la mode, adroit à se faire des amis et surtout à créer autout de son frère, dans le monde des salons et dans le monde des lettres, tout un parti fanatiquement

29. MS. B.N. f. fr. 12763, f^o 171-172.

dévoué à la cause du grand homme"³⁰. The forced comparison is made more explicit still when Reynier, discussing La Mort d'Annibal, says condescendingly: "Il vaut mieux admettre qu'heureusement inspiré par un beau sujet, excité par le souvenir de Nicomède, il réussit pour une fois à s'approcher de son modèle (Pierre Corneille)"³¹.

Now it is obviously hardly conceivable that Thomas Corneille, having enjoyed a very similar upbringing to that of his older brother, living next door to him and starting to write for the stage at a time when Pierre had reached the height of his career, can have failed to seek and receive advice. But it is a long step from this to saying that Pierre, trap-door or no trap-door, is a, perhaps the, major source of Thomas' inspiration and success. It is easy to look backwards from Thomas to Pierre, or even around Thomas to Quinault, Le Royer de Prade and other contemporaries. But this should not prevent critics from realising that Thomas could just as easily have inspired Racine, offering him, if not his sources or even his dramatic methods, at least the public taste which he had helped to create, and which Racine has either to accept or remould, but with which at any rate he must contend.

We have, then, perhaps, to look more closely at some of the trees before we can gauge the extent and quality

30. L. Herland, Corneille par lui-même, Paris, 1954, p. 50.

31. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 167.

of the wood as a whole. We can, and shall, study Thomas' sources, as far as we know or can guess them. While there exists a fair amount of information about Racine's library, even this is incomplete, and we know very much less about the Corneilles'³². Their Jesuit education may help us to distinguish their historical knowledge from that of Racine in general, but perhaps not in particular terms. As far as prefatory writings go, Thomas Corneille's are considerably briefer than either Pierre's or Racine's and, in any case, are subject to the usual reservations.

But first and foremost we shall look at the plays as plays. This is something which, surprisingly, is rarely done, with unhappy consequences. To take but one example, Antoine Adam, a sane and respected critic,

writes about Timocrate in his two generally admirable histories of seventeenth-century French literature, and, by the 1950s, should be able to both weigh up

32. For Racine, Enea Balmas' useful "L'inventario della biblioteca di Racine", Annali dell'università di Padua, Facoltà di Economia e Commercio di Verona, I (1964-1965), pp. 413-472, reproducing the Estat des Livres demeurez apres le decez de feu Mr Racine..., allows us to pinpoint many exact titles, and corrects errors in the inventory drawn up by R.C. Knight, Racine et la Grèce, Paris, 1950. But several other entries in the Estat des Livres are of the type "10 vol. 12^o, dont Poesies choisies", without specified texts. As for Thomas, we know next to nothing. The "Inventaire après décès des biens ayant appartenu à Thomas Corneille", reproduced by Reynier, Thomas Corneille, pp. 352-360, gives a detailed list of legal documents and some idea of the furnishings, and includes the following entry: "Un vieux coffre bahut, tout rompu sans serrure ni clefs, dans lequel se sont trouvés quarante-un volumes de livres de droit et de médecine et autres très anciens tant in-folio que in-quarto, que in-octavo et in-douze, reliés et couverts de parchemin faconné et veau, qui n'ont été autrement inventoriés à cause de leur peu de valeur".

existing criticism and see what gaps in it remain to be filled. Yet he seems never to have asked himself some basic questions, such as: What is a play? How will it inevitably differ from its "sources"? What was the author trying to do? What did he (in preface or Au lecteur) say that he did, and how does this differ from the work itself? What did his contemporaries think, and perhaps why did they so think? Hence the carping criticisms, some of them almost too astonishing to believe. "Ils (des commentateurs trop ingénieux) n'ont pas compris que l'intérêt d'une oeuvre authentique ne peut jamais être dans sa technique", he claims. "Ils n'ont pas vu que si (Pierre) Corneille était parvenu, en ses dernières années, à la plus absolue maîtrise de ses moyens, le prix de ses oeuvres n'était pas dans cette perfection mais dans la peinture de situations tragiques où se débattait un peuple de héros." As a result, perhaps, "Par la faute de Thomas Corneille et de son public, la tragédie, en 1659, est tombée au niveau du roman contemporain, et elle en reproduit les traits les plus contestables". For the younger Corneille is no fool: "Il est le premier qui ait réussi à conquérir aisance et réputation en écrivant des ouvrages dont il mesurait lucidement la médiocrité et les profits ..." How? Why, because

"Il a l'idée, qui lui vaudra de vifs succès, et qui aura littérairement des suites déplorables, de faire entrer dans le cadre de la tragédie et de la tragi-comédie des personnages, des situations, des artifices proprement romanesques ... Bien des honnêtes gens, profondément convaincus, du moins le disent-ils, qu'il ne saurait y avoir de beauté en dehors de la vraisemblance et de la raison, ne s'en laissent pas ^{moins} enchanter par de telles extravagances.

Il possédait le sens du théâtre, mais rien dans aucune de ses oeuvres ne donne l'impression de la vie ..."

Thus the more sceptical would-be reader comes to Adam's views on "le Timocrate de Thomas Corneille, joué en décembre 1656. Le sujet était emprunté à la Cléopâtre de La Calprenède. Il était d'une absurdité extravagante. Il exigeait du spectateur une crédulité sans limite. La pièce réussit pourtant, et l'on regrette de constater que Timocrate fut un des plus grands succès du siècle."

Having thus learned the (wrong) date of performance and some first impressions, we pass to the inner secrets. "Ce nom seul (that of the duc du Guise, to whom Timocrate is dedicated) suffit à expliquer le succès obtenu, à expliquer l'oeuvre même. Car la folie de Timocrate n'est pas plus grande que n'était celle du duc ...", while a footnote adds "Ce sont les naïfs bourgeois qui ont fait le triomphe de Timocrate: rêve d'amour et de gloire dont ils ne sentaient pas l'absurdité". So much for the genesis and reception. What of the author's opinion of his work?

"Thomas Corneille était pourtant sans illusion sur la valeur de Timocrate. Il eut la candeur d'avouer que le succès de sa pièce était peut-être dû à 'l'injuste caprice' du public, incapable de distinguer 'les faux brillants' des véritables beautés. Il n'en fit pas moins jouer une Bérénice, tirée du Grand Cyrus, et qui était tout aussi absurde que Timocrate. Puis il donna Darius, où le roi des Perses vivait caché sous le nom de Codoman. L'invraisemblance romanesque y était poussée jusqu'à la folie." A final barb attempts the coup de grâce: "L'idée ne serait

venue à personne en son temps de le comparer à son frère, ni à Racine, ni même à Quinault. Sa facilité était proverbiale; son adresse en tous genres, unanimement reconnue. On l'applaudissait, tout en sachant qu'il n'y avait à attendre de lui rien d'un peu neuf ni de vraiment personnel."³³

An anthology of such remarks is only useful if we try to see what Adam has been getting at and what, more importantly, he has missed. He apparently believes that a play, considered "technically", can never of itself satisfy; we would not entirely agree. Timocrate, he says, owes much to the contemporary novel; this is true, but why presuppose that this debt must lead to a bad play? And what has the play's success or failure to do with the literary scene in general, contemporary or subsequent? Why should Thomas concern himself about any effect he might have on later writers; why, indeed, should he have to worry about his own future "reputation"? "The play is absurd, totally unbelievable, crazy" - in content, one might add. Must a play, then, be serious or credible or both to be a good play, a successful play? Why should we "regret" Timocrate's success, and not rejoice with Thomas Corneille or at most merely note the reception given to it? The play's fortunes seem to depend variously

33. Quotations are from A. Adam's Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle, Paris, 1948-1956, and his and P. Clarac's L'Age classique, Paris, 1968-1969. They come respectively from: Histoire, vol. IV, p. 250; Histoire, vol. II, pp. 332 and 340; L'Age classique, vol. II, p. 125; L'Age classique, vol. I, pp. 175 and 301; Histoire, vol. II, p. 342; L'Age classique, vol. I, p. 175 and L'Age classique, vol. II, p. 124.

on the duc de Guise and the naïve burghers of Paris - an odd combination - and Adam would have done well to read further early prefaces by Thomas Corneille and other seventeenth-century dramatists before falling into the trap of taking at face value the disarming "self-criticisms" which he quotes. The remark about Thomas Corneille being the first to succeed in writing mediocre plays for financial success begs altogether too many questions; those about the lack of realism in any of his works and the complete superiority over him of P. Corneille, Racine and Quinault are hardly worth considering.

I have chosen to look fairly closely at the tragedies (actual or so-called) which Thomas wrote between 1656 and 1669, and in particular at the six Roman tragedies La Mort de l'empereur Commode (1657), Stilicon (1660), Maximian (1662), Persée et Démétrius (1663), Laodice (1668) and La Mort d'Annibal (1669). These six plays cover a wide range of Roman history, the first three dealing with the Empire, the last three with the Republican era. But it is not the themes I am interested in here, except inasmuch as content will of necessity influence form. It seems to me that any good or even just successful dramatist is concerned, not only with the thematic material of his plays or the language, but also (and perhaps more so) with the construction, the physical putting-together of scenes, acts and intervals, the interplay and ordering of characters, the problems of exposition and dénouement, the arousing of interest and tension in the audience, and so on. In seventeenth-century France he will tell us, in the

run-of-the-mill preface or Au Lecteur, about his sources, the changes he has made, the new characters, their effect, perhaps, and maybe the reception the performed play has had; there may be little or nothing about structure, except in a few instances, such as P. Corneille's Horace. But it would be foolish to suppose that absence of comment about construction means that the dramatist considered it unimportant or did not think about it at all.

For whatever Antoine Adam and others may say, it is on its performance, on its ability to be performed, that a play's success or failure ultimately depends. A poetic but shapeless 5-acter is no play, a well-structured but poorly-versified one can be. There is no point in pretending that classical tragedy is poetry and nothing else, any more than one can omit altogether to study its language and the effects which the language is calculated to have on the audience and eventually on the reader. Yet I do not intend to study Thomas Corneille's rhetoric and style in the following chapters; that must remain for the future. There is enough to be done in examining and re-appraising his dramaturgy, in the widest sense: his understanding of his craft as a dramatist, the "plans" of his plays, what the Parfaict brothers, as we saw, felicitously called "la marche du théâtre". After all, Saint-Evremond

may be right when he suggests³⁴ that, as often as not, seventeenth-century dramatists may have started, not with an historical episode and then worked out a dramatic structure to fit but rather at the other end, with the framework or situation and then looked around for a story with which to clothe it. We shall examine the sources of his plays, but for what they tell us of the changes he has been forced to make in his plots, not for the image of Rome he found there, even less for any mirroring of Roman events in seventeenth-century France. This last is a sterile and dangerous approach, resulting, too, in a denial of the very nature of any play, the essential drama.

The six Roman tragedies, spread over twelve years, form a coherent group and include some of Thomas' finest work as a playwright. It is for these two reasons that I intend to concentrate on them, bringing in other plays of his and some by his contemporaries essentially by way of comparison. The late 50s and the 60s are not only Thomas' most successful years as a tragic dramatist; they represent a crucial period in French dramatic history, and it is only right that Thomas Corneille's contribution to the success of the Paris stage at this time should be rightly judged. For all too often, thanks mainly to past

34. Saint-Evremond, Défense de quelques pièces de M. Corneille, in OEuvres en prose, ed. R. Ternois, Paris, 1969, vol. IV, p. 429: "J'ai soutenu que pour faire une belle Comédie, il falloit choisir un beau sujet, le bien disposer, le bien suivre, et le mener naturellement à sa fin; qu'il falloit faire entrer les Caractères dans les sujets, et non pas former la construction des sujets après celle des Caractères ... "

editors of Pierre's works, the younger brother has been evaluated solely on the basis on his Ariane and Le Comte d'Essex, dating from the second half of Racine's career and judged accordingly.

Chapter 1 attempts to be more than a mere chronology. It sets out to place the Roman tragedies in context by giving details of all of Thomas' plays, based on a complete re-examination of primary and secondary sources dealing with preparation, performance and reception, and includes for the first time an account of what the dramatist says in his prefatory matter. Chapter 2 provides a run-in to the series of tragedies, starting, as any study on the period must, with a re-evaluation of Timocrate, performed only a year before La Mort de l'empereur Commode. Chapter 3 deals with Commode and Camma, chapter 4 with two rather similar plays, Stilicon and Maximian. The fifth chapter turns to one of Thomas' less successful efforts, Persée et Démétrius and compares it with Pyrrhus, performed in the same year. Laodice forms the basis of chapter 6, where it is discussed along with the earlier Antiochus, and chapter 7 deals with his last Roman play, La Mort d'Annibal and looks forward to Racine's Mithridate.

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The need to work at different times in six libraries in four cities has meant that various editions of certain authors have been used, and even quotations will at times refer the reader to more than one edition. But this is always stated, the exact reference being given in the relevant footnote.

For quotations from Thomas Corneille's plays, the edition used is that published by Henry Desbordes in Amsterdam in 1701 (five volumes). The text of Thomas' prefatory material is that of the first single editions.

Latin texts are given in the original, but Greek historians are shown in Latin or French translation, as neither of the Corneilles could read Greek. For Plutarch, I have quoted from Amyot's translation (in a modern edition), as this is almost certain to have been the version they used.

All works referred to in the footnotes, together with others which proved particularly useful, are listed in the Bibliography.

The following works, frequently mentioned in footnotes, are usually abbreviated:

Collins, Thomas Corneille = D.A. Collins, Thomas Corneille: protean dramatist, The Hague, 1966.

Lancaster, History = H.C. Lancaster, A history of French dramatic literature in the seventeenth century, Baltimore, 1929-1942, 5 vols.

M.-L. = OEuvres de P. Corneille, ed Ch. Marty-laveaux,
Paris, 1862-1868 (Coll. "Les Grands Ecrivains
de la France"), 12 vols. + 1 album.

Reynier, Thomas Corneille = G. Reynier, Thomas Corneille,
sa vie et son théâtre, Paris,
1892.

Other works are referred to by their full title when first mentioned in a chapter and by a shortened title in subsequent references within that chapter. A particular effort has been made to avoid the ambiguity and inconvenience caused by repeated use of op. cit., ibid., and so on

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Chapter 1

The dating of plays by Thomas Corneille

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The theatrical career of Thomas Corneille was a long one, extending over thirty fully active years from the end of the 1640s to the late 1670s, and it embraced a wide variety of forms: comedies first, tragedies, a tragi-comedy, tragédies à machines, opéras and so on later. Certain of the later comedies, such as Le Triomphe des Dames, La Pierre philosophaie and the now-lost Baron des Fondrières, were in prose. Thomas also put Molière's Dom Juan into verse, under the title of Le Festin de Pierre. All in all, his dramatic career (not to speak of his later scholarly period as a translator and dictionary-compiler) was as varied as, and more productive than, that of Pierre, nineteen years his elder. Little helpful work has been done on the "sieur de l'Isle" since Reynier's pioneering but now elderly thesis of 1892; as far as accurate chronological research is concerned, the enquiries of Lancaster in the nineteen-thirties did a lot to correct the many errors of the late 19th century critic¹, and subsequent writers (Madame Deierkauf-Holsboer, in her books on the Paris theatres, and Collins, in his rapid survey of Thomas Corneille's production) have done little

1. G. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, sa vie et son théâtre, Paris 1892; H.C. Lancaster, A history of French dramatic literature in the seventeenth century, Baltimore, 1929-1942; P. Mèlèse, Répertoire analytique des documents contemporains d'information et de critique concernant le théâtre à Paris sous Louis XIV, 1659-1715, Paris, 1934, and Le théâtre et le public à Paris, sous Louis XIV, 1659-1715, Paris, 1934.

to alter the picture, or even attempt a synthesis of the available data².

This is not to say that problems do not still surround the writing, performance and publication of many of Thomas' plays, and not only of his early comedies. The position is rather different from that of P. Corneille, where the question of dates has been largely solved. If we are still hesitant about the theatres used by Pierre, the position is steadily becoming clearer, thanks to the work of Lancaster, Couton and Deierkauf-Holsboer, as summarised at the beginning of Maurice Descotes' Les grands rôles du théâtre de Corneille in 1962. Between 1630 and 1637, Pierre Corneille gave his work exclusively to the Marais; Horace in 1640 was probably (pace Marty-Laveaux) put on at the same theatre, as were Cinna, Polyeucte and Pompée - this again refutes Marty-Laveaux's assertion, based, in the case of Pompée, on the rather unreliable 18th century theatre historian, the chevalier de Mouhy. Le Menteur also appeared at the Marais, as would, presumably, La Suite du Menteur and perhaps Rodogune. Théodore we know little about in this respect; such a tricky play may well have marked a change in Pierre's allegiance and a move from the Marais to the Hôtel de Bourgogne. From Héraclius to Oedipe, including Don Sanche, Nicomède and Pertharite, P. Corneille supports the Hôtel, but he is back at the Marais

2. S.-W. Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre du Marais, Paris 1954-1958 and Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, Paris 1968-1970; D.A. Collins, Thomas Corneille: protean dramatist, The Hague, 1966.

with La Toison d'Or and Sertorius before giving Sophonisbe, Othon and Agésilas to the Hôtel de Bourgogne once more. Finally, after Attila at the Palais-Royal, we see his last three plays shared between the three main theatres: Tite et Bérénice at the Palais-Royal, Pulchérie at the Marais and Suréna at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. His final work, in many respects a masterpiece, at least achieved performance at the hands of the best troupe of the day.

Thus, thanks to the latest findings, as summarised by Descotes (who adds his own useful comments), we can see a pattern evolving: the Marais till the mid 40s, then the Hôtel de Bourgogne till almost the end of P. Corneille's career. As far as Thomas Corneille is concerned, we are less lucky: Reynier's views are outdated, Collins slavishly follows Lancaster, as does Deierkauf-Holsboer, at least in her book on the Marais. Even in the light of the most recent evidence, Deierkauf-Holsboer's valuable study of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, the problem needs re-appraisal. We must look again at the available contemporary evidence, including Thomas Corneille's prefaces, largely ignored up till now, and the seventeenth-century accounts of the plays, if we are to piece together a more reliable picture than that offered by the frères Parfaict or Mouhy. In the establishment of facts, a great debt is owed to Carrington Lancaster, who, however, was clearly unable to present as full a picture as he (or we) could have wished, and whose information suffers from being severely fragmented. I plan, then, to take each of Thomas Corneille's

plays in turn, looking at its date and theatre of performance, its date of printing (based on the privilège, the achevé d'imprimer and, where appropriate, the enregistrement sur le livre de la Communauté des Libraires³, and what the author says in any prefatory material he may have added.

There is, obviously, a certain relationship between performance and publication, at least in the majority of seventeenth-century cases. Delay in bringing out a play in print can often, but not always, be taken as a proof of stage success, for once published, the work could be acted by anyone and no further percentage accrued to the author. Pierre Mélése⁴ gives some successes: Oedipe, performed 24 January 1659, published 26 March 1659; L'Ecole des Femmes, performed 26 December 1662, published 17 March 1663; Attila, even Attila (despite Boileau's enigmatic Holà!), performed 4 March 1667, published 20 November 1667. Successive performances in the seventeenth century rarely exceeded the forty-four of the Précieuses ridicules, or even the twenty-three of Attila; hence the legend surrounding the eighty reputed to have greeted Thomas Corneille's Timocrate in 1656 and 1657.

3. See the Registres des privilèges accordés aux auteurs et libraires, MS. B.N. f.fr. 21944-21947. No. 21944 covers the years 1653-1660, 21945 1660-1673, 21946 1673-1687 and 21947 1688-1700. Until recently, little use was made of these manuscript registers.

4. Le théâtre et le public à Paris, p. 297, note 2.

If a gap between performance and publication was usually a sign of success, we can, perhaps, seek some information, too, from contemporary seventeenth-century theatrical practice. Theatres closed annually at Easter (La Grange, in his Registre, gives, year by year, the closing and re-opening dates for Molière's theatre, then for the Guénégaud and the first year or two of the Comédie-Française); to be precise, "du vendredi précédant le premier dimanche de la Passion au lundi de Quasimodo"⁵, i.e. in all just over three weeks. Chappuzeau tells us in 1674⁶ that "toutes les saisons de l'année sont bonnes pour les bonnes comédies: mais les grans Autheurs ne veulent guere exposer leurs pieces nouvelles que depuis la Toussaint jusques à Pasques, lors que toute la Cour est rassemblée au Louvre, ou à S. Germain. Ainsi l'hyver est destiné pour les pieces Heroïques, & les Comiques regnent l'Esté, la gaye saison voulant des diuertissemens de même nature." This rough division largely holds good for P. Corneille and Racine, whose tragedies tended to appear first between November and March. We shall see presently that the same is true of Th. Corneille's more serious plays. For his early comedies, we must also take into account the disruptions caused by the Fronde. Georges

5. Ibid., p. 239, note 4

6. S. Chappuzeau, Le Théâtre françois, ed. G. Monval, Paris, 1876, livre second, ch. XIV, p. 69.

Couton⁷ shows that the Parisian theatres were closed during at least the last two months of 1648 and the first two of 1649. Pierre Corneille, for his part, acknowledges the frustration this has caused him, in a letter to M. de Zuylichem sent from Rouen to The Hague on 6 March 1649: "J'espérais que cet hiver me mettrait en état d'accompagner mes remerciements de quelque pièce de théâtre qui du moins eût été considérable pour sa nouveauté. Les désordres de notre France ne me l'ont pas permis, et ont resserré dans mon cabinet ce que je me préparais à lui donner."⁸ For the 1649/50 season, it is likely that performances were normal, while the 1650/51 season was probably disturbed. As for the 1651/52 season, all we know here is the failure of Pertharite. For the years 1648 and 1649, we may even be able to assume a break between the autumn of 1648 till calm returned to Paris in October 1649 and the theatres re-opened. One victim of the events was Andromède, requested by the court as early as 1647 for the carnival of 1648; the play was not performed until two years later, on January 26, 1650⁹.

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7. G. Couton, Corneille et la Fronde, Clermont-Ferrand, 1951, p. 20.

8. M.-L., vol. X, p. 449.

9. Couton, Corneille et la Fronde, pp. 25, 62, 79. On Andromède, see A. Adam, Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle, Paris, 1948-1956, vol. II, p. 369.

Before we turn to look at Thomas Corneille's plays in chronological order, some remarks must be made about the prefatory material, of which little notice has so far been taken by critics. (Prefaces have even been forgotten about altogether, as Madame Chamoux's recent article happily revealed in the case of Le Baron d'Albikrac.) For an author's own remarks and explanations are clearly important, as can be, at times, their absence - this despite the disservice done to scholarship by W. Leiner in his recent but mistake-ridden book¹⁰. Unfortunately, with Thomas Corneille, we have none of the full explanatory treatises to be found in Pierre's Examens and Discours. Yet, unlike the Examens, all of Thomas' prefaces (as far as we can judge) were written at the time of publication, or between performance and publication. Most of his plays have prefaces of some kind. The early ones carry an Epistre: Les Engagements du hasard is dedicated to Monsieur; Le Feint astrologue to the enigmatical Monsieur B.Q.R.I. (but only in the first, 1651 edition; that of 1653, with the same text, is addressed to M.***); Dom

10. A.-L. Chamoux, "Une dédicace éphémère de Thomas Corneille", R.H.L.F., LXVI (1966), pp. 474-480; W. Leiner, Der Widmungsbrief in der französischen Literatur, 1580-1715, Heidelberg, 1965. Leiner's list of Thomas Corneille's plays (pp. 345-346) is riddled with errors and omissions. He misspells six titles (Le Feint astrologue, Dom Bertrand de Cigarral, Camma, Théodat, Le Baron des Fondrières and Les Dames vengées). He provides no exact achevé dates after Stilicon and omits some before 1660; even the years he quotes are more often wrong than right (e.g. Le Baron d'Albikrac, La Mort d'Annibal, La Comtesse d'Orgueil, Théodat). When he does quote a precise achevé date, this is given incorrectly several times: L'Amour à la mode, La Mort de Commode, Darius.

Bertrand de Cigarral is dedicated to Monsieur again. With L'Amour à la mode in 1653 comes Thomas' first Au Lecteur. More Epistres follow: Le Berger extravagant to M.***, Le Charme de la voix to Monsieur, Les Illustres ennemis to the Comtesse de Fiesque, Le Geôlier de soi-même to Mademoiselle, Timocrate, in 1656, to the duc de Guise, Henri II de Lorraine. No doubt because of its success, Timocrate also sports an Au Lecteur.

Bérénice (1657) and the three following plays all have Epistres. Bérénice's is addressed to the comtesse de Noailles, "dame d'atour de la Reine", who Somaize tells us in his Grand Dictionnaire des précieuses of 1661¹¹ acted as patron to both Thomas and Pierre Corneille: "Noziane (the comtesse de Noailles) est une pretieuse aussi spirituelle qu'elle a l'humeur douce. Elle aime le jeu; les vers luy plaisent extraordinairement, mais elle ne les scauroit souffrir s'ils ne sont tout à fait beaux, et c'est par cette raison qu'elle protege les deux Cleocrites (i.e. the Corneille brothers), qui ne font rien que d'achevé, et qui, dans la composition des jeux du cirque, surpassent tous les auteurs qui ont jamais écrit." None of Pierre's plays is dedicated to the comtesse. La Mort de l'empereur Commode is addressed to Fouquet, not yet disgraced; Darius to M. de Ris, premier président au Parlement de Normandie and son of Jean-Louis Faucon de Ris, seigneur de Charleval, who had threatened P. Corneille during the "querelle du Cid";

11. Ed. Ch.-L. Livet, Paris, 1856, vol. I, p. 290

and Stilicon (1660) to Mazarin. Le Galand doublé, of about the same date, has no preface, nor have Persée et Démétrius (1663) or Pyrrhus, roi d'Epire. Camma is dedicated to Monseigneur le Duc, Condé's son, and Maximian to Monsieur again. An Au Lecteur re-appears in Antiochus (1666) and Laodice (1668), but the Epistre is still to be found in the 1669 Quinet edition of Le Baron d'Albikrac, in La Mort d'Annibal, addressed to Colbert's son, and in the comedy La Comtesse d'Orgueil, dedicated to Monsieur de ***. This, in early 1671, is the last Epistre as such in Thomas Corneille. Ariane, the next year, has nothing, Théodat has an Au Lecteur, La Mort d'Achille and Dom César d'Avalos, published in 1674 and 1676, have nothing, while the comedy Le Comédien poète, written in collaboration with Montfleury, has nothing either. Circé, written with Donneau de Visé, has an undefined preface, while L'Inconnu, published in the same year 1675, has an Au Lecteur. Le Festin de Pierre is prefaced by an Avis du libraire au lecteur, while Le Comte d'Essex, Thomas' last major play, has an Au Lecteur, as do La Devineresse, the libretto of La Pierre philosophale (1681) and Bradamante, published in 1696. Of the three tragédies lyriques, Psyché, Bellérophon and Médée, only Bellérophon contains a preface.

Not all of these épîtres, Au Lecteurs and arguments throw light on the problems of chronology or composition surrounding some of Thomas' plays, and as with all prefatory material they must be treated with caution and simply for what they are. For it is often true, as Scarron

says in the dédicace to his tragi-comedy L'Ecolier de Salamanque, that "les épîtres préliminaires doivent être des panégyriques en petit". But the information in them can supplement and explain hints and facts given in other contemporary accounts and, at times, help to temper the exuberance and partiality of many of the latter.

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As Lancaster says¹², the first five plays of Thomas Corneille (Les Engagements du hasard, Le Feint astrologue, Dom Bertrand de Cigarral, L'Amour à la mode and Le Berger extravagant) present major difficulties of dating. Contemporary accounts are sparse; Loret's Muse historique, for example, does not start its chatty but irreplaceable reporting until 12 May 1650.

1. Les Engagements du hasard. The play has a five and three-quarter year gap between its privilège (dated 12 March 1651) and the achevé d'imprimer of 9 December 1656 - this is, indeed, by far the longest delay in all Thomas Corneille's dramatic production. The privilège, along with those of Le Feint astrologue, Dom Bertrand, L'Amour à la mode and Le Berger extravagant, was enregistré on 29 December 1653¹³. The Epistre to Monsieur in the first edition (Arsenal Rf. 2669) explains why: "vous scauez que

12. Lancaster, History, vol. II, pp. 749-750.

13. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21944, f^o 46 r^o.

je panchois entierement à le supprimer (cet ouvrage), & que n'estant qu'un premier essay de Poësie, que ie n'auois osé auoir quand il parut il y a sept ou huit ans sur le Theatre de l'Hostel de Bourgogne, ie faisois dessein de n'en permettre iamais l'impression; mais vous vous y opposastes si fortement pour l'interest du fameux D. Pedro Calderon ... que tout ce que ie pûs obtenir, ce fut la liberté d'y changer ce que ie trouuois de plus foible ..". The Epistre itself must date from late 1654 or after, as Th. Corneille mentions, towards the end, Boisrobert's Inconnu, which appeared in 1654 at the Hôtel de Bourgogne (privilege 16 February 1655, achevé 15 April 1655).

When published, Les Engagements had a common privilege with Le Feint astrologue and with Pierre's Andromède and Nicomède. Le Feint astrologue was, however, achevé d'imprimer on 31 May 1651, soon after the privilege was granted, while Nicomède was achevé on 29 November 1651 and Andromède (the play) on 13 August 1651¹⁴. Les Engagements du hasard was thus published at the very beginning of the successful stage run of Timocrate, and a few months after Pierre Corneille had the full text of his Imitation published (March 1656). Could it be that Thomas wanted to consolidate the success which seems to have greeted Les Engagements before his new triumph with Timocrate? Now that Pierre was coming to the end of his period of withdrawal from the stage, the time was ripe; it had been Pierre, in any case,

14. M.-L., vol. V, p. 257.

who had put Les Engagements, and Le Feint astrologue, forward for approval in 1651, as the text of the privilege shows: "... Nostre cher & bien amé (sic) LE SIEVR CORNEILLE, Aduocat en nostre Cour de Parlement de Normandie, Nous a fait remonstrer, qu'il a cy-deuant donné au Public diuerses pieces de Theatre qui ont esté receuës avec succez, & qu'il est sollicité d'en mettre maintenant au iour quatre nouuelles intitulées, Andromede, Nicomede, le feint Astrologue, & les Engagemens du hazard; ce qu'il ne peut faire sans auoir nos Lettres de permission sur ce necessaires ...". The plays themselves have no author's name on the title-page; this is the case with all of Thomas' early works until Pyrrhus in the mid-1660s.

As far as date of performance goes, the chevalier de Mouhy, in his Journal chronologique du théâtre françois, vol. VII¹⁵, Parfaict and Reynier¹⁶ all suggest 1647, which is also the date in the Mémoire de Mahelot¹⁷; it would correspond to the 7- or 8-year gap between performance and publication mentioned by Th. Corneille in the Epistre to the first edition (see above), but only provided that the time interval he quotes is accurate and that the Epistre itself dates from 1654 or 1655. But later Lancaster¹⁸ puts

15. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 483-484.

16. F. and C. Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre françois, Paris, 1745-1749, vol. VII, p. 190; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 4

17. La Mémoire de Mahelot, ed. H.C. Lancaster, Paris, 1920, p. 27.

18. Lancaster, History, vol. II, pp. 749-750.

forward 1649, the year in which Thomas Corneille is supposed to have completed his legal studies (on 21 October¹⁹). This date, while possible, can only remain, like the others, at best hypothetical. Madame Deierkauf-Holsboer²⁰ finds Lancaster's arguments "peu probants" but adds her own, whose validity seems equally open to doubt:

"... il est impensable que le jeune poète ait cédé ses deux premières pièces dramatiques pour la représentation à la troupe royale en pleine Fronde, dans une période de troubles et de combats, à un moment donc où les spectateurs désertaient le théâtre.

Le fait que les représentations des Engagements du Hazard ont succédé si rapidement à celles du Feint Astrologue prouve que les comédies de Thomas Corneille ont eu du succès. Cette grande activité n'a pu être déployée, cela va de soi, que parce que les représentations théâtrales reprenaient normalement leur cours. C'est pour cette raison que nous estimons qu'il vaut mieux s'en tenir aux dates données par les frères Parfaict."

A recent note to a reference dated 1649 would suggest that Thomas' drama was already known by then, and might support the case for a 1647 début²¹. Antonio Enriquez Gomez, in the preface to his Sanson Nazareno, mentions

19. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 4

20. Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, p. 65.

21. A. Stegmann, L'héroïsme cornélien. Genèse et signification, Paris, 1968, vol. I, p. 14.

that the Corneille brothers are outstanding, "il primero en lo grande y lo sublime de los pensamientos; y el segundo, en lo galante y yocos de el teatro". But M. Stegmann dates these words 1649 on the basis of a list of Enriquez Gomez's works, given in the Prologo, the last being Sanson, and said to have been written at the rate of one a year from 1640 to 1649: "Hazen nueve volumes en prosa y verso, todos escritos desde el año de quarenta, al de quarenta y nueve, a libro por año u, a año por libro .." But the first edition of Sanson only appeared in 1656, in Rouen, printed by Maurry, and the printer adds a note for the reader which qualifies the author's Prologo remarks: "Di principio a la estampa deste Poema en el año 1649 y la fuy prosiguiendo hasta el canto decimo tercio: en cuyo tiempo lo suspendí por faltarme el ultimo". Whatever the exact date of composition of Sanson may be, it and the remarks about P. and Th. Corneille in the Prologo only appeared in 1656, and it is not possible to conclude, from them alone, as Stegmann does, that Thomas was already well-known in 1649.

The theatre, as the Epistre tells us, was the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The play, according to Mouhy, "eut beaucoup de succez et donna une grande idée des talens de

l'auteur"²².

2. Le Feint astrologue. Le Feint astrologue was dedicated in the 1651 edition (B.N. Rés. Yf 704) to a certain M. B.Q.R.I., whom no-one, not even Lancaster, has yet succeeded in identifying. But in the 1653 edition brought out by G. de Luynes, as conserved at the Arsenal (Rf. 2190 (1) Rés.) - an edition which bears an identical privilege to that of 1651 -, the Epistre, while keeping the same text, is addressed to M. ***. What happened in these two years to make Thomas desire even greater anonymity for his patron? The printing of Le Feint astrologue, as we saw earlier, was completed in under three months, on 31 May 1651, but the enregistrement, along with that of Les Engagements, Andromède and Nicomède, was delayed until the end of 1653, the year in which the registre was first kept.

The Epistre to B.Q.R.I./*** mentions that the latter attended several performances or that some were arranged for him: "Le Theatre luy (à cet ouvrage) a donné des graces qu'il est bien difficile qu'il conserue dans le cabinet ... Ainsi i'ay sujet d'apprehender que cette Comedie dont la representation vous a diuerty tant de fois, ne vous semble

22. Mouhy, loc. cit. Mouhy's inaccuracies are well-known, and the details he provides must be treated with much caution. But it is surprising how often figures he quotes (for performances by Molière's company, the Guénégaud and the Comédie-Française, for example) correspond exactly to the data provided by La Grange's Registre and Comédie-Française sources; one wishes that later critics had been as willing to establish facts with such care. For this reason, I have felt able to quote his comments on Thomas' plays, where they seem interesting or throw new light.

froide sur le papier .." As with Les Engagements, Thomas has hesitated to publish his new play, and he explains why: "Pour moy, ie me serois contenté du succez qu'elle a eu au Theatre, sans l'abandonner à la Presse, si ie n'auois voulu détromper beaucoup de personnes qui en ont crû mon Frere l'Autheur, à cause de la conformité du nom qui m'est commun avec luy" (Even so, as we have seen, Thomas' early plays are published without an author's name on the title-page, and often even the épître or the privilege fails to reveal the identity of the author.) The Epistre of Le Feint astrologue ends with the assertion that the play is his "coup d'essay" - i.e., his first printed work, presumably (or are we to suppose that it was also performed before Les Engagements du hasard? His admission that Les Engagements was only "un premier essay de Poësie" leaves the question open to conjecture.)

Lancaster places the first performance of Le Feint astrologue early in 1650, whereas Mouhy, Parfaict, Reynier and Deierkauf-Holsboer opt for 1648²³. It is probable, in fact, that Le Feint astrologue is the second play, but Lancaster's argument that the two comedies must be close in time "in view of the fact that Thomas wrote so much that he must have composed rapidly"²⁴ seems rather weak.

23. Lancaster, History, vol. II, pp. 749-750; Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 176; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VII, p. 212; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 5; Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, p. 65.

24. History, vol. II, p. 749.



The only firm fact we have about Thomas Corneille in 1650 is his marriage to Marguerite de Lampérière, Pierre's sister-in-law, on 5 July 1650. There is, as yet, no proof that Les Engagements was not written between Thomas' completion of legal studies at Caen in 1646 and his officially becoming a lawyer in the autumn of 1649, at the age of 24. Indeed, the whole question of when his plays were written is the most difficult of all to answer.

Le Feint astrologue, still according to Lancaster²⁵, was played at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Why? "It is probable that Thomas Corneille took a hint from d'Ouville when he gave the stage-name of a farce player to a valet, calling him Philipin rather than Jodelet because he was writing for the Hôtel de Bourgogne rather than for the Marais." The play must, at any rate, have succeeded, for, as we saw, Thomas states in the Epistre: "Le Theatre luy a donné des graces qu'il est bien difficile qu'il conserue dans le cabinet", and later he talks explicitly of "le succez qu'elle a eu au Theatre."

As far as publication goes, Dom Bertrand de Cigarral and L'Amour à la mode present the same peculiarities as the initial two comedies: they share a privilège of 24 December 1651, awarded to Pierre Corneille, which the latter also uses for Pertharite.

25. History, vol. II, p. 753.

3. Dom Bertrand de Cigarral. Dom Bertrand is achevé soon after, on 30 December 1651, while L'Amour à la mode and Pertharite share an achevé d'imprimer dated 30 April 1653. Hence we can, with some justification, assume that Dom Bertrand is the earlier of Thomas' plays, especially as it was a success - De Visé, in his Eloge de Thomas Corneille in the January 1710 number of the Mercure galant, says that it was played more than twenty times at Court alone²⁶, while the frères Parfaict²⁷ affirm that it was still performed occasionally less than thirty years before they wrote. Consultation of La Grange's Registre, which extends up to 1685, shows that the play had eight performances with Molière's troupe in Paris in the 1659-60 season, four in the 1660-61 season (including one at the Louvre), then a renewal of interest in 1681 and 1682: twelve performances, including two at St-Cloud²⁸. Additionally, the text of the Au Lecteur to L'Amour à la mode makes the performance order quite clear: "Voicy vne Comedie d'un caractere si different de la derniere de ma façon qui l'a precedée sur le Theatre, que quoy qu'elles soient toutes deux du mesme genre, il n'y a guere plus de disproportion du Tragique au Comique, que des extrauagances

26. p. 273

27. Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VII, p. 288

28. For performances of Th. Corneille's plays from 1680 onwards, see H.C. Lancaster, The Comédie-Française 1680-1701. Plays, actors, spectators, finances, Baltimore, 1941, and The Comédie-Française 1701-1744. Plays, actors, spectators, finances, Philadelphia, 1951.

ridicules de D. Bertran, à l'enlèvement galant d'Oronte qui fait tout en celle-cy."

Mouhy, Parfaict and Reynier place Dom Bertrand's first performance in 1650, the year of Thomas' marriage, but Lancaster points out that in the last scene of act I there is a letter dated 19 May 1651, which would seem to indicate performance round about that date. Antoine Adam, though, in his more recent Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle proposes "pendant la saison 1650-1651", i.e. before Easter 1651. Lancaster's suggestion seems the most credible²⁹.

The Epistre to Dom Bertrand seeks to justify the choice of subject (the title-character's manners are "fort peu à l'usage de la Cour, sa façon de traiter l'amour assez particulière, & ses raisonnemens fort Proverbiaux") and inattention to the unities: "souvenez-vous que je marche sur les pas d'un Espagnol, & que comme l'unité de lieu, & l'observation des vingt & quatre heures sont des regles que le fameux Lope de Vega a toujours négligées, ... tous ceux qui ont écrit après luy ne s'en sont pas mis davantage en peine ..".

4. L'Amour à la mode. This play was, according to all the commentators so far mentioned, performed in 1651 -

29. Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 451; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VII, p. 281; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 8; Lancaster, History, vol. II, p. 754; A. Adam, Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle, vol. II, p. 341, note 1.

Lancaster suggests the latter half of that year, as Dom Bertrand came in the first. Stronger evidence can be found in Tallemant des Réaux, whose Historiettes³⁰ report that in 1652 Mlle de Rambouillet had not yet seen the play by carnival-time (which ran from Twelfth Day to Ash Wednesday) and asked Segrais to see the comtesse de Fiesque about arranging a visit. Reynier³¹ suggests that both of these comedies by Th. Corneille were first put on at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, yet Madame Deierkauf-Holsboer, in her book on the Marais³², puts forward the theory that they perhaps saw the light at that theatre: "Dom Bertrand de Cigarral et L'Amour à la mode, la troisième et la quatrième pièce de Thomas Corneille, ont été jouées d'original au théâtre du Marais. Ceci n'est pas absolument incontestable, nous n'en possédons pas d'indication certaine, mais M. Reynier, dans l'étude qu'il a consacrée à la vie et aux oeuvres de Thomas Corneille, le déduit du fait que le valet, le personnage principal dans les deux pièces, parle du nez et que Lisette, la suivante dans L'Amour à la mode, appelle l'attention sur le 'poil grison' et 'la nezillardise' de celui-ci. Il y a donc tout lieu de penser qu'il s'agit de Jodelet. Thomas Corneille a souvent montré, au cours des années ultérieures, qu'il avait gardé

30. Ed. A. Adam, Paris, 1960, vol. II, p. 384.

31. Thomas Corneille, pp. 8, 365.

32. Le théâtre du Marais, vol. II, p. 52

de la sympathie pour le Marais où son frère a connu tant de triomphes, et il n'y a rien d'étonnant qu'il délaisse l'Hôtel de Bourgogne pour la salle de la rue Vieille-du-Temple, en 1651"³³.

There seems, though, to be some confusion here, for Reynier, page 8, suggests explicitly that both plays were put on at the Hôtel de Bourgogne (cf. his summary list, page 365), but that, for the main rôle of Dom Bertrand, for example, the part was taken by Jodelet of the Marais. Reynier comes back to this on pp. 202-204 of his study. If we return to the reference in Tallemant des Réaux just quoted, we read³⁴: "Au carnaval (1652), Mme de Montglas fit une plaisante extravagance chez la presidente de Pommereuil. On y devoit jouer Pertarite, roy des Lombards, pièce de Corneille qui n'a pas réussy. Mlle de Rambouillet dit à Segrais, garçon d'esprit qui est à

33. The frères Parfaict (Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VII, p. 312) point this out, and suggest that Oronte may have been played by Floridor, and his valet Cliton by Jodelet. Jodelet, we know, was at the Marais from 1634, passed over to the Hôtel de Bourgogne soon afterwards, but returned to the Marais not later than 1641 and remained there until 1 April 1657 (G. Mongrédien, Dictionnaire biographique des comédiens français du XVIIe siècle, Paris, 1961, p. 93). Floridor, on the other hand, was at the Marais from early 1638, but entered the Hôtel de Bourgogne, on the King's orders, in April 1647 (ibid., p. 79). Thus Floridor at least was at the Hôtel de Bourgogne at the relevant time, although this fact in itself does not allow us to assume, as Reynier does (Thomas Corneille, p. 5) that Thomas Corneille's early plays were therefore performed at the Hôtel. Cf. Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, p. 88, where the suggestion about Dom Bertrand is again made.

34. Pp. 384-385.

cette heure à Mademoiselle, qu'elle n'avoit point veü l'Amour à la mode, et qu'elle l'aymeroit bien mieux. 'Dittes-le à la comtesse de Fiesque.' La Comtesse le dit à Hippolite; c'est le filz du président de Pommereuil du premier liect, un benais qu'on appelloit ainsy parce qu'on luy faisoit la guerre qu'il estoit amoureux de sa belle-mere. Hippolite, qui estoit espris de la Comtesse, alla dire aux comediens que, quoy qu'il en coutast, il falloit absolument jouer L'Amour à la mode, et les envoya changer d'habits." Yet, although Pertharite was performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, this is no proof in the case of L'Amour, for we do not know who acted chez la présidente de Pommereuil.

The inconsistency in Madame Deierkauf-Holsboer's argument, then, merely serves to highlight the difficulties surrounding Th. Corneille's early plays; Lancaster, in 1932, refrained from suggesting theatres for Dom Bertrand and L'Amour à la mode. If there is no proof that Thomas Corneille moved then to the Marais, this is an interesting comment on the two brothers' varying practice and, as we shall see later, perhaps an early sign of the inferiority of the Marais troupe as compared to that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

5. Le Berger extravagant. Leaving comedy, Thomas Corneille turns momentarily to the pastorale burlesque and brings out Le Berger extravagant. The privilège of the first edition is dated 21 April 1653, the achevé 10 May of the same year, and the privilège is enregistré in de Luyne's name on 29

December 1653. The Epistre to the first edition, addressed to Monsieur ***, refers perhaps to Charles Sorel, but more probably to Damien Mitton (1618-1690)³⁵. The relevant passage runs: "Vous avez tant de part en la production de cette Pastorale, que l'offre que ie vous en fais se doit plutôt appeller vne restitution, qu'un present. En effet, vous ne m'en avez pas seulement inspiré le dessein, mais... ie suis obligé d'aduouër que c'a esté vous qui avez formé mon caractere, puisque c'a esté vous qui m'avez fait remarquer les plus aymables extrauagances de Lysis, mais avec vne exageration si charmante, qu'il ne m'estoit plus guere difficile de reduire en vers avec quelque grace, ce que ie vous en oyois dire si agreablement en prose."

As for the first performance of Le Berger, Lancaster and Deierkauf-Holsboer situate it as probably the latter half of 1652, whereas Mouhy, Parfaict, Reynier and P. Cox place it in 1653³⁶. The same date is chosen in an earlier part of the Journal chronologique du théâtre français (vol. II), where the chevalier de Mouhy says it was played at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, a detail also mentioned by Reynier³⁷.

35. Cf. F. Bar's edition of the play, Geneva/Paris, 1960, pp. 83-85.

36. Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 47; Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, p. 71; Mouhy, MS. B.N.f.fr. 9235, f^o 227; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VII, p. 394; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 9; P. Cox, The comedies of Thomas Corneille, 1649-1677, unpublished thesis, Exeter, 1961.

37. Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 21944, f^o 1000 r^o; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 365.

There is, indeed, little, if any, proof, and Lancaster abstains from a definite conclusion on this point. If Loret's mention, in the Muse historique of 12 October 1652, of a play by Th. Corneille performed two days earlier chez la comtesse de Fiesque does relate to Le Berger, as Lancaster suggests³⁸, this does not prove that the play was first publicly performed at this exact time.

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6 Les Illustres ennemis. Next chronologically comes Les Illustres ennemis, dedicated to the same comtesse de Fiesque. The privilege of this and of Le Geôlier de soi-même are of the same date 3 April 1656 and both are enregistrés by de Luyne on 15 April 1656³⁹, the former play being called Les généreux & illustres ennemis, the latter Le Jodelet prince. But Le Geôlier was printed much sooner, at the end of April, as against 30 November 1656 for Les Illustres ennemis. Mouhy, Parfaict and Reynier date the first performance 1654⁴⁰, but Donneau de Visé, in a pamphlet of 9

38. Muse historique, vol. I, p. 296; Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 47.

39. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21944, f^o 48 r^o.

40. Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 673; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VIII, p. 82; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 9. Mouhy (loc. cit.) says it was played "alternativement a l'hotel de Bourgogne avec la Comedie des Genereux Ennemis de M. l'abbé de Boisrobert". MS. B.N. f.fr. 9230, f^o 1008 v^o, suggests it appeared "le lendemain" of Boisrobert's play, whose first performance Lancaster (History, vol. III, p. 74) places in the first half of 1654.

February 1663, published in the Nouvelles nouvelles - where he supports Pierre Corneille against critics of the latter's Sophonisbe - mentions April 1655 as the date of Les Illustres ennemis⁴¹. Lancaster⁴² deals with the rival plays on the same theme by Scarron and Boisrobert. Despite Parfaict's and Reynier's assertions, the theatre in which Thomas Corneille's play was produced is likely to have been the Marais; Les Illustres ennemis, then, may mark the first work given by Thomas to the troupe du Marais.

In the Epistre, the author informs the comtesse de Fiesque that he is unable to keep the play secret any longer: "L'Approbation dont il vous a plû vous montrer si liberale enuers de Poëme, m'est trop glorieuse pour la tenir plus long-temps secrete ... J'ay toujours dans l'esprit les douces Idées de l'heureuse representation de cet Ouurage qui fut faite il y a quelque temps en vostre presence."

7. Le Geôlier de soi-même. Performed in the same year as Les Illustres ennemis, but published earlier is Le Geôlier (privilège 3 April 1656, enregistrement 15 April 1656, achevé 28 April 1656). Reynier dates the play 1654, but common opinion puts its first performance in 1655; Deierkauf-Holsboer and Lancaster both suggest the end of that

41. Cf. on this point Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre du Marais, vol. II, p. 84; Lancaster, History, vol. III, pp. 69, 75 and 76.

42. History, vol. III, pp. 69-70.

year⁴³. The theatre, despite what Mouhy and Reynier say, is again the Marais⁴⁴. Parfaict⁴⁵ tells us about the subtitle of Jodelet prince, while the Epistre addressed to Mademoiselle mentions the "quelques applaudissemens que cette Comedie (ait) pû recevoir au Theatre", and also "la nouveauté d'un sujet tout extraordinaire, & le mélange assez peu commun de plaisant & de sérieux, à qui le public n'a pû refuser ses acclamations".

Indeed, its success seems to have been considerable, for even after Molière's return to Paris in 1658, the Geôlier was being performed fairly regularly for some years: six times during the 1659-60 season at the Palais-Royal, four times in 1660-61, three in 1661-2 and eight times in 1662-3. After a break of 18 years, it was revived at the Comédie-Française in February 1681 and had twenty performances between then and 1685, when La Grange's Registre ends. Only on four occasions (one in 1661 and three in 1681) is the comedy called Le Geôlier de soi-même; in the vast majority of cases, it is entered in the Registre as Jodelet prince.

8. Le Charme de la voix. Again, we find a common privi-lège, this time shared by the celebrated Timocrate; the

43. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, pp. 9-13; Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre du Marais, vol. II, p. 85; Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 78, note 4.

44. Deierkauf-Holsboer, loc. cit.

45. Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VIII, p. 120.

date is 28 December 1657. But Le Charme, enregistré on 28 December 1657 as well, is achevé d'imprimer on 4 January 1658, whereas Timocrate is complete two days previously, on 2 February 1658.

Criticism up to the present has suggested that Le Charme de la voix is Thomas' next play, although dates suggested for its first performance vary widely. Mouhy, Parfaict and Reynier place it as early as 1653, while Lancaster thinks it might have been 1656⁴⁶. If the play was a failure - and the Epistre says as much: "puisque'il (le public) s'est déclaré contre celui-ci (ce poème), ie dois estre persuadé qu'il a eu raison de le faire" - it would seem likely that Thomas Corneille had it performed not long before publication, say in the first three months of 1657. Mouhy and Deierkauf-Holsboer, as well as Reynier, again suggest the Hôtel de Bourgogne as the theatre, but there is no proof of this⁴⁷.

This tentative dating of Le Charme is strengthened

46. Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 315; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VII, p. 405; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 9; Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 83, note 13.

47. Mouhy, loc. cit.; Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, p. 80; Reynier, loc. cit.

by two pieces of evidence: a couple of curious facts discovered in the privilège registers and a little-published letter. First, the register. Le Charme de la voix and Timocrate are duly entered under 28 December 1657⁴⁸ but the privilège itself is said to have been granted a week earlier:

Du 28 Decembre 1657

le S^r Augustin Courbé Ce Jour dhuy le S^r Augustin Courbe Marchand Libraire nous a presente un priuilege quil a obtenu sous son nom pour deux Pieces de theatre de M^r Thomas de Corneille intitulé (sic) Timocrate, & les charmes (sic) de la Voix & aussi de Reimprimer en un ou plusieurs volumes diuerses pieces de theatre de la composition du sieur de rotrou, de Scudery & tristan - ledit Priuilege en date du 21 Decembre Dernier Pour vingt anneés ("dix années" is scored out).

The printed first editions of the two plays show 28 December as the privilège date.

This is the first, if a small fact, not to be confused with any misreading of privilège and enregistrement dates in the printed extract privilège. The second point is more interesting. Seven months earlier, there is the following entry in the registre⁴⁹:

Du xii^e May 1657

Ce jourdhuy Mons^r Corneille nous a présenté un priuilege obtenu sous son nom pour deux pieces de Theatre la premier intitulée Timocrate & l'autre le Charme de la voix. ledit priuilege

48. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21944, r^o 176 v^o.

49. Ibid., r^o 28 r^o.

en datte du premier jour de May 1657
pour cinq ans a condition de trans-
port.

No printed edition corresponding to this earlier intention of Thomas (or is it Pierre?) Corneille exists. A privilège of May 1657 rather than December 1657 for Timo-
crate would coincide with the end of its initial, highly successful run, while for Le Charme de la voix it helps to narrow down the supposed first performance date, if we can assume, as seems certain, that the play was not a success. It is significant, too, that the May privilège, as registered, was for only five years, whereas the definitive December one is for twenty.

The second piece of evidence is the letter contained in MS. B.N. f.fr. 12763, folios 161-164, first brought to light by G. Vincent in La Revue of June 1906. The letter is addressed to Monsieur Lucas in Paris but is unsigned and bears no date or place-name. Vincent thinks the author is Pierre Corneille, while later critics ascribe it variously to Pierre de Marcassus and Coqueteau de la Clairière⁵⁰. One can certainly rule out Pierre Corneille, as the writing contains marked differences from that in more or less contemporary manuscript letters of his. But whether the writer is Marcassus or Coqueteau is of no great import, for the message remains the same. The letter

50. G. Vincent, "Corneille inédit. Lettre et poésie de Pierre Corneille sur le champignon", La Revue, LXII (1906), pp. 409-417; F. Lachèvre, Glanes bibliographiques et littéraires, Paris, 1929, vol. I, p. 165; G. Couton, La vieillesse de Corneille, Paris, 1949, p. 320, note 48.

runs:

Le mauuais temps, la difficulté des chemins, le passage des soldats et les affaires de la table de marbre m'ont obligé de manquer a ma promesse. J'espere que M. de la Coste qui vous doit aller voir a Paris, pourra m'acquitter d'une partie. je suis extremement ravi du succès qu'a eu le Timocrate de Mons^r de Corneille. je croy que son Charme de la voix n'aura pas de moindres applaudissements. j'auois enuie de vous faire un remerciement des obligations que je vous ay, mais je vous dois trop pour m'y resoudre, et il y a trop de plaisir estre vostre obligé pour songer a s'acquitter. Si vous auies souhaitté autre chose que mon Champignon je vous l'aurois enuoyé, puisqu'il n'y a rien dans mon cabinet dont vous ne puissies aussy bien disposer que de ma volonté⁵¹.

Then follows the Latin poem and a French translation.

Vincent and Lachèvre are obviously right to place this text in the winter months, given the opening words, although there is nothing to indicate that it must be March-April 1657 as they suggest - i.e., at the end of Timocrate's main run - rather than late 1656, when the play is already seen to be a great hit with the Parisian public. But the order of events seems clear: Le Charme is first performed after Timocrate is established, but not necessarily before the end of its run. Indeed, to place it in late April 1657 (allowing for the Easter break) raises the problems of the earlier, May 1657 privilège entry, quite apart from any question of whether the Marais was or was not open after Easter 1657. We know that Le Charme de la voix was a flop; it can have had no immediate resurrection; so the reference in the letter to Lucas, together with the first privilège register entry, helps us to date the first performance of Le Charme within probably the first two or

three months of 1657.

In the Epistre to the comedy, besides dealing with the play's fortunes and his attitude to Moreto's Spanish original ("j'eusse peut-être moins failli, si je ne me fusse pas attaché si étroitement à la conduite de D. Augustin Moreto, qui l'a traité dans sa Langue, sous le tiltre de Lo que puede la apprehension ..."), Thomas mentions a friend who urged him to write the play: "neantmoins cet excellent Amy qui me portoit à ce dessein, appuya si fortement deuant vous le conseil qu'il m'auoit déjà donné d'y traouiller, que vous vous en laissastes vous mesme persuader ..."

Between the appearance of Le Geôlier late in 1655 and Le Charme, Thomas thus had only twelve months to work upon both the second of these two plays and his new "tragedy", Timocrate. The latter's huge success has been the subject of a good deal of the little critical writing devoted to Thomas Corneille between that day and this.

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9. Timocrate. Eighty consecutive performances is the figure usually bandied about in connection with Timocrate (e.g. by the abbé Desfontaines), or else "un hiver entier", a half-year's run⁵². But what credence can we give to such figures? The privilège was not taken until 28 Decem-

52. P.-F.G. Desfontaines, Paradoxes littéraires, Paris, 1723, pp. 184-185; Mercure galant, January, 1710, p. 274.

ber 1657 (although see above), and the achevé is dated 2 February 1658; Lancaster puts the first performance at 16 December 1656⁵³. In fact, the play must have been performed slightly prior to this: Deierkauf-Holsboer gives 12 December as the date of the première, basing herself on the Muse historique of Saturday 16 December, which relates that the previous Tuesday the King had honoured the théâtre du Marais with his presence in the rue Vieille-du-Temple⁵⁴. Yet surely the play must have had public performances even before 12 December, when the King, on the strength of its success, went to see it? Indeed, in the third volume of La Prétieuse, dated 1657 but achevé d'imprimer on 30 December 1656, the abbé de Pure mentions two visits he made to the Marais to see the play. "Cleo-mire m'y mena deux fois à deux desseins: le premier fut de me donner vn regal à la Françoisse, en me donnant le plaisir d'vne chose nouvelle. Et le second fut de me faire sauourer le plaisir que ie n'auois gousté qu'imparfaitement. La premiere fois i'y vis MONSIEVR, et la plus grand (sic) part des Princes de nostre Cour. La seconde fois le Roy mesme en auoit voulu prendre le plaisir, et il en sortit si satisfait, qu'outre la liberalité qu'il fit aux Comediens, il voulut mesme témoigner sa ioye à Monsieur

53. History, vol. III, p. 184.

54. Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre du Marais, vol. II, p. 88; Muse historique, 16 December (vol. II, pp. 275-276). But cf. Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, p. 83, where she twice states that the initial performance was on 16 December.

de Corneille le jeune, qui en est l'Autheur, et luy dit fort obligeamment qu'il deuoit estre bien glorieux d'auoir fait vn si bel ouurage⁵⁵. From the context, these are unlikely to have been the first two performances. Can we find a more suitable date? Descotes puts forward the more realistic suggestion of November 1656, also given by Parfaict and by Mouhy, which leaves a reasonable, but not overlong, interval for the play to establish itself⁵⁶.

There has also been a suggestion that the play was acted on both the main Paris theatres of the time; Despois says that the Hôtel de Bourgogne put it on after the Marais: "Mais, le succès étant épuisé, et, malgré la réputation des Grands Comédiens dans la tragédie, (la pièce) ne s'y soutint pas aussi bien que sur une scène plus modeste"⁵⁷. De Visé recounted a similar story in the Mercure galant just after Thomas' death, and it appears again in Maupoint's Bibliothèque des théâtres⁵⁸. The Mercure galant account suggests that, as all Paris knew Timocrate by heart after the Marais production, the Hôtel de Bour-

55. M. de Pure, La Prétieuse, 3e partie, ed. E. Magne, Paris, 1939, vol. II, pp. 176-177.

56. M. Descotes, Le public de théâtre et son histoire, Paris, 1964, p. 107; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VIII, p. 178; Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, ff 1188-1189.

57. E. Despois, Le théâtre français sous Louis XIV, Paris 1874, p. 14, note 3.

58. Mercure galant, January, 1710, pp. 275-276; Maupoint, Bibliothèque des théâtres, Paris, 1733, p. 301.

gogne's attempt was not successful, even though that theatre had by far the better company of actors.

The question of the number of performances simply cannot be resolved, for lack of evidence - among companies playing in the first part of the second half of the seventeenth century, only Molière's troupe, still in the provinces, will leave us with a precious guide, in the Registre of La Grange. But Madame Deierkauf-Holsboer⁵⁹ indicates that all available evidence points to a closure of the Marais at the end of March 1657 (the end of the 1656-7 season), with the departure into the provinces of Haute-roche and actors from his former troupe, which had been integrated into the Marais company. If Timocrate ceased to be played at the Marais at the end of March, and if performances had started early in the previous autumn, at the beginning of November or even in October, there would have been a maximum of about eighty, at the normal rate of three per week.

Finally, it would appear, from the Epistre to the duc de Guise, with whom the Corneilles were to stay in Paris after their move from Rouen in the autumn of 1662, that Thomas read his "tragedy" to the duc a good while before its first performance in (?) November 1656. Thomas asks "votre altesse" to grant Timocrate "la continuation des graces qu'elle luy a déjà tant de fois si gracieusement prodiguées ... Pour moy, MONSEIGNEVR, comme ie n'oublieray

59. Le théâtre du Marais, vol. II, pp. 89-91.

iamais l'honneur que ie receus dans le commandement que vous me fistes de vous faire la lecture de cet Ouvrage longtemps auant qu'il fut représenté" (my italics). If so, it is quite possible that Le Charme de la voix, discussed a moment ago, was both written after the composition of Timocrate - say in the second half of 1656 - and performed after it as well, albeit unsuccessfully (Mouhy suggests that "elle tomba a la seconde Representation"⁶⁰). But we must remember that there is a fair gap in the performance schedule of Thomas Corneille between the end of 1652 (Le Berger extravagant) and April 1655 (Les Illustres ennemis), so that the latter and Le Geôlier, Timocrate and Le Charme may all, or in part, have been written or conceived in the later part of this period.

Timocrate is Thomas' first tragedy, but it is a tragedy in name only. More romanesque still, in many respects, is Bérénice, which, with La Mort de l'empereur Commode, discussed shortly, leads into Thomas Corneille's first tragic cycle proper, lasting from 1657 to 1669. Les Illustres ennemis, Le Geôlier de soi-même and Timocrate (at least initially) all appeared at the Marais and, as we shall see, La Mort de Commode probably did, too. What about Bérénice, which follows Commode? The play is published early in 1659 (privilège 10 February, shared with Commode; enregistrement 11 March; achevé 17 March 1659). What evidence is there, though, of performance? An answer to this question

60. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 315.

will help us to place Thomas Corneille's first tragedies in chronological order.

Mouhy and Parfaict claim that Bérénice was performed at the Marais and in 1657; Lancaster considers the theatre to be unknown and hazards the second half of 1657 for the performance - the same period as he suggests for La Mort de Commode⁶¹. Bérénice is not mentioned by Deierkauf-Holsboer in her book on the Marais but in her book on the Hôtel de Bourgogne she indicates that, if the Marais is shut in 1657 and 1658, Bérénice, performed after April 1657, must have been at the Hôtel⁶². In this connection, there is a letter from Pierre Corneille in Rouen to the brothers' Paris correspondent, the abbé de Pure, dated 9 July 1658, in which Pierre writes: "Mon frère vous salue, et travaille avec assez de chagrin. Il ne donnera qu'une pièce cette année". This must be Darius, not La Mort de Commode, as suggested by Marty-Laveaux, who takes over a wrong date given for the latter play by the frères Parfaict⁶³.

Lancaster believes Darius to have appeared in the winter of 1658-9 (see below), basing this argument on P. Corneille's letter of 9 July 1658, which I have just quoted.

61. Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr.9235, f^o 225; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VIII, pp. 197-198; Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 189.

62. Vol. II, p. 84. Cf note 66 below.

63. M.-L., vol. X, p. 482, note 1; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VIII, p. 243.

But he goes on to assume⁶⁴ that "the other two (La Mort de Commode and Bérénice) must have been performed before 1658, probably in the second half of 1657". This I would suggest is not necessary; it brings us on to a first part of the question of La Mort de Commode.

The Mercure galant for January 1710 says that Commode came "quelque temps après (Timocrate)", and this would seem to suggest that there was no intervening play. Yet we must remember that, towards the beginning of his Eloge, de Visé states that he will only mention some of Thomas Corneille's plays, as they can easily be found in collected editions; clearly, too, given the fulsome praise accorded to those he does describe, there would have been insufficient room to list them all⁶⁵. As Bérénice is not dealt with, one cannot be categorical about Commode's position in the chronology, but it would seem most probable that the order of production was: Timocrate, Commode, Bérénice. To revert now to Pierre Corneille's letter of 9 July 1658, does he, or could he, not refer here, not to a calendar year, but to a theatre year, starting after Easter? If this is so, if Darius is being prepared for the 1658-9 theatre season and will appear late 1658/early 1659, Bérénice could still have been played in the early part of calendar year 1658, between 1 January and the Easter break (Easter in 1658 came late, on 21 April). As Bérénice

64. History, vol. III, p. 187.

65. Mercure galant, January 1710, pp. 276, 273.

seems to have had only a moderate reception - the Epistre to the comtesse de Noailles says that "Berenice ne croit plus avoir rien à craindre de la censure du Public puisque vous entreprenez sa deffence" -, a performance in 1658 is likely, anyway, as it would be nearer the privilège date of February 1659.

Thus I would place the plays in the following order of performance: La Mort de l'empereur Commode probably late 1657, Bérénice early 1658, Darius (which will be dealt with shortly) at the end of 1658 or early in 1659. This perhaps throws some light on the possible chronology, but it does not determine the relevant theatre(s)⁶⁶.

66. Mme Deierkauf-Holsboer, in her book on the Marais (vol. II, pp. 90-91) affirms that the theatre was closed during the 1657-8 and 1658-9 season, but none of the three points she mentions to support her argument - Tallemant's 1657 Historiette on Mondory, with the words: "Le théâtre du Marais n'a pas un seul bon acteur, ny une seule bonne actrice" (ed. G. Mongrédien, vol VI, p. 128), Th. Corneille's letter of 19 May 1658 or Lancaster's check-list of extant plays - offers conclusive proof that no plays were staged at the Marais over these two years. If we accept her view, which I personally cannot do, Commode and Darius would have had to appear either at the Hôtel de Bourgogne or else at the Marais before April 1657 and after March 1659 respectively.

A. Pascal (Les autographes de Corneille, Paris, 1929, p. 67, note 1) says that the two plays mentioned in the Thomas Corneille letter of 4 April 1659 to de Pure are Darius and La Mort de l'empereur Commode. But this cannot be so, as Darius was only achevé d'imprimer on 2 May 1659. The two plays referred to must be Bérénice, achevé on 17 March 1659 and Commode, the Courbé and de Luyne edition of which was achevé on 19 January 1659 (The de Luyne edition followed on 29 April 1659). The previous play published by Thomas was Timocrate, a year earlier, in February, 1658.

10. La Mort de l'empereur Commode. Let us now pass to look at La Mort de Commode, which would appear to have preceded Bérénice. This time, we can be rather more sure of the theatre - the Marais, which Thomas is shortly going to abandon. De Visé is the sole contemporary account, while Mouhy informs us that "cette Piece eut un tres grand succez" and was played at the Louvre in front of the King⁶⁷. The Mercure galant and Maupoint⁶⁸ add that this was only after the King and Court had gone to the Marais to witness one of the early successful performances.

The date of the printing of Commode is interesting. It is the only time in Thomas Corneille's theatre that the achevé comes before the privilège. There exist in the Bibliothèque Nationale copies of two 1659 editions of Commode. The first edition, by Courbé and de Luyne (8^o Yth 20399) gives the privilège as 10 February, the enregistrement as 11 March and the achevé d'imprimer pour la première fois as 19 January 1659. The second, published by de Luyne alone (8^o Yth 27920) has the same privilège and enregistrement dates but an achevé of 29 April 1659, the only date quoted by G. Couton, for example, who suggests that the dedication to Fouquet is a result of the similar dedication of Oedipe, published on 26 March 1659⁶⁹.

67. De Visé, Mercure galant, January, 1710, pp. 276-277; Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 367.

68. Maupoint, Bibliothèque des théâtres, p. 80

69. G. Couton, La vieillesse de Corneille, p. 324, note 23. In fact, the enregistrement of the privilège of Commode and Bérénice is shown in the register as 12 March 1659 (MS. B.N. f.fr. 21944, f^o 183 r^o), but this is a small point.

Pierre Corneille never has this peculiarity but, with Attila, there is the only verifiable case in his theatre of the privilège (25 November 1666) being taken out before the first performance on 4 March 1667. The play was published on 20 November of the same year. (There are two cases of this latter feature in Th. Corneille: Ariane and L'Inconnu). La Mort de Commode also offers an example of a play sharing a privilège date (if not an actual privilège) with another by the same author. There are eight examples of this in Thomas Corneille, all in the major, first half of his dramatic career, from the late 1640s to the late 1660s: Les Engagements du hasard and Le Feint astrologue; Dom Bertrand de Cigarral and L'Amour à la mode; Timocrate and Le Charme de la voix; Les Illustres ennemis and Le Geôlier de soi-même; La Mort de l'empereur Commode and Bérénice; Stilicon and Le Galand doublé; Persée et Démétrius and Pyrrhus, roi d'Epire; Le Baron d'Albikrac and Laodice. This phenomenon might have made it easier for a play like Commode to be printed before the privilège had in fact been granted.

11. Bérénice }
 12. Darius } Bérénice, next chronologically, has already
 been dealt with in discussion of the dating of Thomas' early plays. The tragedy Darius is the last of this particular trilogy difficult to date. As suggested above, the end of 1658 or the beginning of 1659 would seem a likely moment for the first performance (the privilège is dated 30 March 1659, it is registered on 27 April 1659 and the

achevé is 2 May 1659). Despite Parfaict's condemnation of it as "(l'ouvrage) le plus foible de M. Corneille de Lisle: Le plan, les caracteres, la conduite, & la versification n'ont rien qui marquent le talent de l'Auteur"⁷⁰, the play seems to have been a moderate success, to judge from the Epistre to M. de Ris: "L'ouvrage que ie vous presente a receu quelque applaudissement du Public, mais ie ne me flate point assez pour m'en déguiser les défauts ..."

Mouhy, however, is as stern as the Parfaict brothers:

"elle tomba a la quatrieme representation. C'est une des pieces les plus mediocres de ce Poete. Plan, caractere, conduite, versification, tout en est foible, et le poete n'y est pas reconnaissable; c'est ainsi qu'on en parla alors, et depuis la tradition toujours servile a adopté ce jugement sans autre examen. J'ai cru qu'il n'étoit permis de ne pas etre tout a fait de cette opinion et pour la justifier j'en extrais la derniere scene du cinquieme acte qui m'a semblé theatrale et digne de plus d'indulgence"⁷¹.

The theatre was probably the Marais, despite Madame Deierkauf-Holsboer's arguments. Parfaict and Reynier opt for the Hôtel de Bourgogne, but Lancaster says it is impossible to be precise⁷². All we can note are two slightly

70. Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VIII, p. 331.

71. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9230, f^o 1095 r^o-v^o.

72. S.W. Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, pp. 84 and 87. (cf. note 66, above); Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VIII, p. 331; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 365; Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 189.

conflicting views of the Marais troupe at this time. In a letter from Pierre Corneille to the abbé de Pure dated 12 March 1659⁷³, concerning the rôle of Mlle de Beauchâteau in the former's Oedipe, Pierre talks about news reaching his brother Thomas from the Marais about Mlle de Beauchâteau's success at the rival Hôtel de Bourgogne. This incident, given the performance dates of Oedipe, concerns the period late January to early March 1659, so Thomas is still in touch with the Marais at this time. His last play before Darius, Bérénice, was, as we have seen, performed at the Marais at the end of 1657 or perhaps early in 1658, before Easter. It is possible then - no more - that Darius, a year later, was also given to the Marais, and that the change of theatre only came with Stilicon or Le Galand doublé.

At the same time, Thomas, in his letters of the period, is expressing dismay at the Marais standards⁷⁴. On 20 July 1659, he mentions that he still has some "attachement" for the Marais; yet more than a year earlier, on 19 May 1658, he had advocated a link-up between Molière's troupe, then in Rouen, and the Marais one: "Je voudrais qu'elle (la troupe de Molière) voulut faire alliance avec le Marais, elle en pourroit changer la destinée. Je ne sçay si le temps pourra faire ce miracle"⁷⁵. So we cer-

73. M.-L., vol. X, p. 483.

74. See my article "Composition et représentation chez Thomas Corneille", Studi francesi, 36, (1968), pp.471-476.

75. MS. B.N. f.fr. 12763, f^o 170.

tainly cannot be sure, in the present state of knowledge, that the Marais got Darius, or even Bérénice, which probably preceded it.

At about this time - the spring of 1659 - Thomas was, it seems, working on a play called Stratonice. A letter of March 1659 from M. de la Coste to the abbé de Pure recounts that "notre amy Monsieur de Corneille le jeune vous va fournir du sujet pour deux Relations"; one of these plays may well have been Stratonice⁷⁶. Nine months later, writing to the abbé, Thomas confesses that "J'ay creu deuoir abandonner le suiet de Stratonice qui me plaisoit fort, seulement a cause que Mr Quinault estoit plus aduancé de deux cent vers que moy, et je n'ay rien fait en cettrencontre que ce que je m' imagine qu'un autre feroit pour moy dans une pareille occasion"⁷⁷. It seems likely, though, that he was having difficulties with the play earlier that year, for a postscript to a letter of 20 July 1659 to the same correspondent notes plaintively: "J'ay fait deux actes d'une piece dont je ne suis pas trop satisfait, mais il est trop tard pour prendre un autre dessein"⁷⁸. Given the success of Thomas' three plays performed after this date (Le Galand doublé, Stilicon and Camma), the

76. MS. B.N. f.fr. 15209, f^o 72-73, misquoted by Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 333, note 2. See p. 476 of my article mentioned in note 74 above.

77. Letter of 1 December 1659, MS. B.N. f.fr. 12763, f^o 171.

78. MS. B.N. f.fr. 12763, f^o 168.

reference is almost certainly to the unfortunate Stratonice.

13. Le Galand doublé. } Le Galand doublé and Stilicon pre-
 14. Stilicon. } sent problems of performance and publication which I have
 discussed at some length elsewhere⁷⁹, although it is inter-
 esting to note that when registered on 5 May 1660, the
Galand doublé was called Le mariage de rien and Stilicon
L'Estilicon. The privilege register has the following
 entry⁸⁰:

Ce jourdhuy Le S^r De Luynes marchand Libraire nous a
 présenté un privilege quil a obtenu souz son nom pr
 deux Liures intitulez L'Estilicon et Le mariage de Rien
 par le s^r De Corneille Ledit Privilege en datte du 3e
 iour de may 1660 pour sept années.

But a further major point arises in connection with
 one of these: how did Stilicon come to be written? The
 affair turns on the person of Fouquet and his invitation
 to P. Corneille to return to the theatre despite the fail-
 ure of Pertharite at the end of 1651 or in the early days
 of 1652.

Fouquet, the great mécène, as Somaize calls him in
 his Grand Dictionnaire des précieuses of 1661, was generous
 with his cash. In the Epistre of La Mort de Commode,
 Thomas Corneille talks of "ce zele passionné dont j'aspirois
 à vous rendre de prompts témoignages". But Fouquet had got
 in first: "Cependant, MONSEIGNEUR, quelque violente que i'en
 eprouue l'ardeur, ie ne me voy plus en estat de vous la

79. See note 74.

80. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21944, f^o 188 r^o.

faire paroistre dans toute sa pureté; vous avez trouué moyen de me la rendre suspecte à moy-mesme, & les Ordres fauorables par lesquels vous avez daigné me preuenir, m'en font un deuoir si absolu, qu'il exige de ma reconnaissance ce qui ne deuoit estre qu'un effet de mon inclination."

The eulogy of Fouquet in this Epistre (published January 1659) is thus an acknowledgement of the pension which the surintendant des finances had previously granted him⁸¹.

Other writers also benefit from the minister's patronage. Gilbert mentions similar support in the dédicace to his tragedy Arie et Pétus, published in 1660 (achevé 12 December 1659). Quinault, too, who dedicates Amalasonte (1658) to Mazarin, changes to Fouquet for Le Feint Alcibiade, a tragi-comedy performed early in 1658 and printed the same summer. Although there is no mention of cash, Quinault promises "de continuer ce que i'ay commencé de faire, depuis que le bruit que la Renommée fait de vous est venu iusqu'à moy". La Mort de Cyrus, printed a year later (achevé 12 July 1659) is dedicated to Mme Fouquet.

It was perhaps as a result of the successful performance of La Mort de Commode late in 1657 that Fouquet turned from Thomas to Pierre Corneille. He offered the latter a choice of subjects; or so runs the A Monseigneur le Procureur général Fouquet, surintendant des Finances, in front of Oedipe: "Choisis-moi seulement quelque nom dans l'histoire / Pour qui tu veuilles place au temple de

81. E. Gros, Philippe Quinault, sa vie et son oeuvre, Paris, 1926, p. 46.

de la Gloire, etc." Yet in the Examen to Oedipe (1660), Corneille says: "Je ne pus me défendre des ordres qu'il (Fouquet) daigna me donner de mettre sur notre scène un des trois sujets qu'il me proposa. Il m'en laissa le choix .."⁸². The Au Lecteur of 1659 is slightly more non-committal: "... il me fit cette nouvelle grâce ... de me proposer trois sujets pour le théâtre, dont il me laissa le choix... Tout le monde ne sait pas que sa bonté s'est étendue jusqu'à ressusciter les muses ensevelies dans un long silence et qui étoient comme mortes au monde, puisque le monde les avoit oubliées ... Sans ses commandements, je n'aurois jamais fait l'Oedipe. ... Je n'ai fait aucune pièce de théâtre où il se trouve tant d'art qu'en celle-ci, bien que ce ne soit qu'un ouvrage de deux mois, que l'impatience française m'a fait précipiter, par un juste empressement d'exécuter les ordres favorables que j'avois reçus."⁸³. It is idle to speculate whether Corneille approached Fouquet in the first instance, or whether Fouquet made the first advance, *is as futile as the chicken and egg controversy.*

Fontenelle, in the biography of his uncle⁸⁴, tells us that, in 1659, "sollicité par M. Fouquet, qui négocia en Surintendant des Finances, et peut-être encore plus poussé par son penchant naturel, (P. Corneille) se rengagea

82. M.-L., vol. VI, p. 122 and pp. 128-129. My italics.

83. M.-L., vol. VI, pp. 124-128.

84. Fontenelle, Vie de Corneille in OEuvres, Paris, Brunet, 1752, vol. III, p. 110.

au Théâtre. M. le Surintendant, pour lui faciliter ce retour, & lui ôter toutes les excuses que lui auroit pu fournir la difficulté de trouver des Sujets, lui en proposa trois. Celui qu'il prit fut Oedipe. M. Corneille son frere prit Camma qui étoit le second, & le traita avec beaucoup de succès. Je ne sai quel fut le troisième."

Yet in his Bibliographie cornélienne, Emile Picot conjectures that "il se pourrait que le troisième sujet fût celui de Stilicon". To which Georges May replies that "son raisonnement, séduisant quoique pas entièrement convaincant, a été accepté de plusieurs critiques. En dernier ressort, M. Lancaster n'en fait pas même mention et continue à considérer le troisième sujet comme ignoré"⁸⁵.

In fact, we can be almost certain that Stilicon was the third subject offered to Pierre, and subsequently taken over, like Camma, by his younger brother. In the Muse historique of 29 January 1661, Loret, in an account of the first performance of Camma at the Hôtel de Bourgogne the previous evening, associates Stilicon with the latter play and with Oedipe:

Ainsi cette Pièce divine (Camma)
 Qui du grand Oedipe est cousine
 Et propre soeur de Stilicon,
 (Pièces qu'on tient sans Parangon)
 Est très-digne de sa naissance,
 Et par l'agréable abondance
 De mille beaux traits différens,
 Ne fait point tort à ses parens. (ll. 215-222).

The subject of Camma may well have come to Fouquet's mind

85. E. Picot, Bibliographie cornélienne, Paris, 1876, p. 83; G. May, Tragédie cornélienne, tragédie racinienne, Urbana, 1948, p. 45, note 59. This refers to Lancaster History, vol. III, p. 432.

because of its appearance in the Jesuit Pierre Le Moyne's Galerie des femmes fortes, of which he possessed a copy⁸⁶.

All three subjects are highly dramatic, and Pierre's choice falls on Oedipe. The play, he tells us in the Au Lecteur, was written in two months⁸⁷; it was first performed on Friday 24 January 1659⁸⁸, printed soon after (privilege 10 February, achevé 26 March 1659), and was such a success that the King came to the Hôtel de Bourgogne to see it.

D.A. Collins comments on Pierre's decision to work on the Oedipus theme: "Pierre Corneille did not dramatise the story of Stilicon, but how like him it would have been to do so. It is strange that he did not." Then, having mentioned Fouquet, he quotes the phrase from the Au Lecteur to Oedipe: "Sans ses commandements je n'aurais jamais fait l'Oedipe", and interprets this as a virtual command to Pierre to choose Oedipe and leave the other two subjects to Thomas⁸⁹. But clearly Pierre Corneille deliberately selects Oedipe ("... trois sujets, dont il me laissa

86. See Inventaire de la bibliothèque de N. Fouquet à St-Mandé, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9438, f^o 50 and U.V. Chate-lain, Le surintendant Fouquet, Paris, 1905, p. 238.

87. M.-L., vol. VI, p. 128.

88. Cf. Loret, Muse historique, 25 January 1659, ll. 67-98.

89. D.A. Collins, Thomas Corneille, pp. 114, 115.

le choix" - Au Lecteur) and congratulates himself on the choice⁹⁰.

Two facts emerge from a study of P. Corneille's Oedipe and contemporary documents. Firstly, it would appear that Pierre does not entirely succeed with, or understand, the character of Oedipe and Sophocles' picture of him; he is unable to get under his skin. Aristotle had praised Oedipus; P. Corneille does not seem to realise why, seeing Oedipe as blameless⁹¹. For Corneille, too, the arrival of the messenger seems to be the result of chance, although he prides himself on having prepared the incident from the dramatic point of view: "Je ne l'ai introduit qu'au cinquième acte non plus qu'eux (Sophocles and Seneca); mais j'ai préparé sa venue dès le premier, en faisant dire à Oedipe qu'il attend dans le jour la nouvelle de la mort de son père"⁹².

Secondly, why the rush to finish Oedipe? It may well reflect Corneille's desire to have the part of Jocaste taken by Mlle du Parc, whom he had so much admired in Rouen in the early summer of 1658. She moved out of Molière's troupe for the 1659-60 season, playing at the Marais along

90. Cf. G. Couton, La vieillesse de Corneille, p. 35, and Corneille, Paris, 1958, p. 150.

91. Discours de la tragédie in M.-L., vol. I, pp. 56-57.

92. Discours du poème dramatique in M.-L., vol. I, pp. 42-43.

with her husband from Easter 1659 to Easter 1660⁹³. Then she returned to the Palais-Royal.

The part of Jocaste was eventually taken, not by the Marquise herself, but by Mlle de Beauchâteau, at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, according to P. Corneille's letter to Pure dated 12 March 1659. It is clear from this, though, that Mlle de Beauchâteau is only a replacement. Corneille talks to de Pure about "la nouvelle représentation d' Oedipe" which the abbé has just seen, and goes on: "En vérité, Monsieur, quelque approbation qu'aye emportée notre nouvelle Jocaste, elle n'a point fait faire tant de ha! ha! dans l'Hôtel de Bourgogne que votre lettre dans mon cabinet; mon frère et moi les avons redoublés à toutes les lignes, et y avons trouvé de continuels sujets d'admiration. Je suis ravi que Mlle de Beauchâteau aye si bien réussi; votre lettre n'est pas la seule que j'en ai vue: on a mandé du Marais à mon frère qu'elle avoit étouffé les applaudissements qu'on donnoit à ses compagnons, pour attirer tout à elle; et M. Floridor me confirme tout ce que vous m'en avez mandé. Je n'en suis point surpris, et il n'est rien arrivé que je ne lui aye prédit à elle-même, en lui disant adieu, quand je sus l'étude qu'elle faisoit de ce rôle. Je souhaite seulement pouvoir trouver un sujet assez beau pour la faire paroître dans toute sa force; je crois qu'elle prendra bien autant

93. C.V. de La Grange, Le Registre, 1659-1685, ed. B.E. and G.P. Young, Paris, 1947, pp. 3, 18.

de soin pour faire réussir un original qu'elle en a fait à remplir la place de la malade ..."⁹⁴.

Where was Mlle du Parc when Oedipe was played in late January 1659? Still with Molière? She played in L'Etourdi and Le Dépit amoureux (at least, her husband played Gros-René in Le Dépit), the two plays La Grange mentions in 1659⁹⁵. Could Mlle du Parc have played a rôle at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where we know Oedipe was performed, and still remain with Molière's troupe? Such interchange of actors and actresses was unusual at the time. We can be fairly certain that la Duparc must have stayed primarily with Molière throughout the winter season 1658-9, because La Grange says that the troupe played from 3 November 1658 "jusques a Pasques ensuiuant sans changement d'acteurs dans la troupe"⁹⁶. It may be that she started taking the part of Jocaste, then fell ill during pregnancy; we learn, in fact, from Auguste Jal's Dictionnaire critique that she and Du Parc had a daughter Catherine baptised at St-Germain l'Auxerrois on 13 October 1659⁹⁷.

The change in Thomas' allegiance from the Marais to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, apparently at the time of Stilicon,

94. M.-L., vol. X, pp. 482-484. My italics.

95. Le Registre, pp. 2-3.

96. P. 3.

97. A. Jal, Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d'histoire, 2nd ed., Paris, 1872, p. 936.

may also have been due, in small part, to questions of cost. In Somaize's La Pompe funèbre de M. Scarron of 1660, Scarron's bookseller, together with a lawyer and actor, visit him while he is ill. The actor proposes Quinault as a worthy successor to Scarron; but the bookseller maintains that Quinault has not yet succeeded "au Palais", although he has "au Theatre". Then "Il (the bookseller) proposa ensuite Monsieur Corneille le jeune, alléguant que son Dom Bertrand, son Amour à la mode, & son Jodelet prince (Le Geôlier de soi-même), estoient de chef-d'oeuvres comiques. Le député des Comédiens, demeura d'accord que ses Pièces estoient admirables; mais il dit, qu'elles coustoient trop cher aux Comédiens, & qu'ainsi ils le prioient de ne le point eslire ..." ⁹⁸. Similar remarks about the cost of Pierre Corneille's plays have been attributed to the actress La Beaupré. Segrain tells us ⁹⁹ that "la Beaupré excellente Comédienne de ce tems-là, qui a joué aussi dans les commencemens de la grande reputation de Monsieur Corneille, disoit: 'Monsieur Corneille nous a fait un grand tort, nous avons ci-devant des Pièces de Théâtre pour trois écus, que l'on nous faisoit en une nuit, on y étoit accoutumé, & nous gagnions beaucoup, presentement les Pièces de Monsieur de Corneille nous coûtent bien de l'argent, & nous gagnons peu de chose.

98. A. de Somaize, Le pompe funèbre de M. Scarron, Paris J. Ribou, 1660, p. 7.

99. Segraisiana, The Hague, P. Gosse, 1722, p. 192.

Il est vrai que ces vieilles Pièces étoient misérables; mais les Comédiens étoient excellens, & ils les faisoient valoir par la representation".

Tallemant, too, in one of his Historiettes, mentions the financial aspect, but in a slightly different vein: "D'Orgemont et Floridor, avec la Beaupré, soutinrent la troupe du Marais à laquelle Corneille, par politique, car c'est un grand avare, donnoit ses pièces; car il vouloit qu'il y eust deux troupes"¹⁰⁰. This seems to be confirmed by a letter from Pierre to the abbé de Pure, dated 25 April 1662, where the elder brother writes: "Je ne renonce pas aux acteurs qui le soutiennent (le Marais); mais aussi je ne veux point tourner le dos tout à fait à Messieurs de l'Hôtel, dont je n'ai aucun lieu de me plaindre, et où il n'y a rien à craindre quand une pièce est bonne"¹⁰¹.

Finally, and perhaps most convincing of all, is de Visé's account in the Mercure galant of January 1710: according to Thomas' friend, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, jealous of the success of Timocrate and La Mort de Commode, took over some of the Marais actors in order to entice Thomas Corneille to write for them¹⁰². The trick seems to have worked ...

100. Tallemant des Réaux, Historiettes, ed. A. Adam, Paris, 1960, vol. II, p. 776.

101. M.-L., vol. X, p. 494.

102. Mercure galant, January, 1710, pp. 277-278.

Was it as a result of this action that Stilicon gave rise to a cabal before its first performance on 27 January 1660? Coqueteau de la Clairière, in a letter to the Corneilles' Paris correspondent, the abbé de Pure, dated from Rouen 13 January 1660, writes: "Nous atendons avec impatience le succes de Stilicon, la ruine des brigues que l'on auoit faittes pour en diminuer l'esclat et le restablissement de la chaleur des bourguignons"¹⁰³. This would suggest that Stilicon was known in Rouen from readings some time before the first performance at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. In fact, Somaize in Paris knows of it a while before this, for in his Véritables pretieuses, whose first edition (Jean Ribou) is achevé on 7 January 1660 (with a privilège of 5 days later and an enregistrement of 18 January, cancelled the following day), he has this to say about Thomas Corneille: "quoique ce soit une divinité parmi les Comédiens, les encens qu'on lui donne ne sont pas si generaux que ceux de son frere. Ne croyez pourtant pas que j'en veuille dire du mal; au contraire, je tiens que c'est celui de tous les auteurs qui pense le plus profondement, et sans doute l'envie avouera que son Stilicon est tout à fait beau"¹⁰⁴.

Now, if the printing date of this, the first of the two 1660 editions of Somaize's work - the other is published by Loyson in September - is indeed correct, it is

103. MS. B.N. f.fr. 15209, f^o 67 v^o.

104. Ed. P. Lacroix, Geneva 1868, p. 36 (reprint of the 1660 J. Ribou edition).

clear that Stilicon was ready for publication by the end of 1659, but had run into difficulties ("les brigues que l'on avait faites" and the reference to the troupe of the Hôtel de Bourgogne). Lancaster rightly gives 7 January 1660 as the date of the Véritables pretieuses achevé and 27 January 1660 for the first performance of Stilicon, and adds that the Somaize farce came out before Stilicon was published¹⁰⁵. Now, the Véritables pretieuses is achevé d'imprimer on 7 January, before its privilege is granted, and Stilicon on 16 August 1660, and as Stilicon is mentioned in the text of the farce, it is clear that the Véritables pretieuses must have appeared between early readings of Stilicon in Rouen and first performance in Paris. The other plays which Somaize refers to along with Stilicon all appeared on stage before 7 January 1660: Boyer's Clotilde at the Hôtel on 18 May 1659 and his Fédéric on 14 November 1659; Quinault's Stratonice was performed on 2 January 1660 and Magnon's Zénobie (if this is indeed the Zénobie referred to) in December 1659 at the Petit-Bourbon. Only one of these plays was printed before 7 January 1660 (Boyer's Clotilde); the other three will appear on 17 March, 15 May and 15 April 1660 respectively.

Finally, Coqueteau mentions in the same letter of 13 January 1660 that he is awaiting the return to Rouen of Thomas Corneille ("M. de Lisle"). As we know from his

105. History, vol. III, p. 440.

letter to de Pure of 1 December 1659, Thomas intended to journey to Paris for Stilicon; it is on the spot, then, that he prepared the play for its first performance at the end of January and had to deal with the brigues to which it gave rise.

15. Camma. Camma, reine de Galatie, is performed and printed in 1661. But as in the case of Le Baron d'Albion, Lancaster confuses the enregistrement with the achevé. The former is dated 23 February 1661¹⁰⁶; the achevé is 24 March 1661. Concerning the first performance, critics are unanimous: the Hôtel de Bourgogne on 28 January 1661. The play was a great success, and the Mercure galant of January 1710, in its article on Th. Corneille the month after his death, explains that Thursday performances were required for Camma in addition to the regular Friday, Sunday and Tuesday ones. The Guénégaud put it on again briefly in June 1679, according to La Grange's Registre¹⁰⁷.

16. Maximian. Following Camma, there are two less meritorious works: Maximian and Persée et Démétrius. Loret, in the Muse historique of Saturday 11 February 1662, gives an account of the première of Maximian at the Hôtel de Bourgogne earlier that month, "depuis peu" - perhaps Friday 3 February, as most plays opened on a Friday, although

106. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21945, f^o 5 r^o. The privilège is dated 14 February.

107. P. 221.

Mouhy¹⁰⁸ suggests Sunday 5. The printing of the first edition is carried out in May (privilège 16 May, shared with Sertorius; enregistrement 23 May; achevé 31 May 1662).

Madame Sylvie Chevalley, in her recent Album du théâtre classique, claims that Maximian was a success¹⁰⁹. Certainly Loret says in that same Muse historique entry that it was played "avec grand applaudissement" and indeed that "l'on dit que depuis un an,/ Et, mesmes, depuis plus de seize,/ (Aux autres Autheurs n'en déplaize)/ Les Comédiens de l'Hôtel / N'ont représenté rien de tel"¹¹⁰.

This seems a typical Loret "on dit", however, for there was no other contemporary comment on the play and we must assume that its success was shortlived.

17. Persée et Démétrius. The even more unexceptional Persée et Démétrius comes out rather less than a year later. Lancaster puts it in December 1662, following Mouhy (where 27 December is specified), Parfaict ("la fin du mois de Décembre") and Reynier¹¹¹. But Mélése¹¹² chooses January 1663, and this date seems almost certain to be correct, for Loret, in his Muse historique of 31

108. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 808.

109. Paris, 1970, p. 98.

110. Lines 246, 250-254.

111. Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 444; Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 943; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. IX, p. 181; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 30.

112. P. Mélése, Répertoire analytique, p. 121.

December 1662, says only that the play has been announced, and that he has not yet seen it¹¹³.

The play is not printed until 1665 and in the first edition the privilège date is 11 May 1665. But more than two years earlier there is mention of a Démétrius in the enregistrement by de Luyne on 4 March 1663 of P. Corneille's Sophonisbe¹¹⁴. This can only be Thomas Corneille's Persée et Démétrius, as Boyer's Mort de Démétrius was already published in 1661 (privilège 10 September 1660, achevé 10 December 1660). Sophonisbe itself is achevé d'imprimer as early as 10 April 1663.

18. Pyrrhus, roi d'Epire. There is no prefatory material for Persée et Démétrius or for the next play, Pyrrhus, roi d'Epire; the two share identical privilège and achevé dates: 11 May 1665 and 8 August 1665, and the privilège of each is registered après coup by Quinet on 15 September 1665¹¹⁵. Mouhy, Parfaict and Reynier place Pyrrhus in 1661, but Lancaster chooses the 1663/4 season, on the basis of a performance witnessed on 20 January 1664 by von Blumenthal¹¹⁶. The theatre, as with all of Thomas Corneille's

113. Lines 68-70, 106.

114. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21945, f^o 22 r^o.

115. Ibid., f^o 40 v^o.

116. Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 973; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. IX, p. 84; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 365; Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 445. Cf. W. Mangold, "Ch. C. von Blumenthals Pariser Tagebücher: eine deutsche Quelle für französische Theatergeschichte (1663, 1664, 1666)", Z.F.S.L., IV, 2 (1882), p. 239.

plays since Stilicon, is the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

If Pyrrhus does in fact appear at the end of 1663 or in January 1664, four of Thomas' plays (Camma, Maximian, Persée et Démétrius and Pyrrhus) will have had first performances in the three-year period from January 1661 to January 1664. And this, too, despite the momentous move by Pierre and Thomas Corneille from Rouen to Paris in the late autumn of 1662. We know, from Pierre's correspondence, at least, that the change was difficult and occupied much of their time. A letter of 25 April 1662 from Pierre to the abbé de Pure¹¹⁷ indicates that they are in the midst of preparations; but they are still in Rouen on 4 October, when Chapelain writes: "Vous tardés trop à venir vous establir à Paris ..."¹¹⁸. Pierre himself brought out his Théâtre, along with the new Examens and the three Discours, in late October 1660; La Toison d'Or is played in Normandy the same year, at the Marais in February 1661 and is published in May; Sertorius is played at the end of February 1662 and is published in July, while Sophonisbe, performed in January 1663, is printed three months later. But Pierre certainly used his absence from the theatre after Pertharite to prepare at least some of this material.

19 Antiochus. A two-year performance gap occurs before Thomas' next play - and his only officially-called tragi-

117. M.-L., vol. X, p. 494.

118. Chapelain, Lettres, ed. P. Tamizey de Larroque, Paris, 1883, vol. II, p. 258.

comedy - Antiochus, played in 1666¹¹⁹. In addition, this is virtually the last French play to be designated a tragi-comedy (as distinct from a comédie héroïque); Lancaster indicates that only two extant plays called tragi-comedies date from the period 1667-1672¹²⁰. From 1670, the new term comédie héroïque comes to cover virtually the same dramatic form as the previous tragi-comedy. Antiochus is performed and published in the same year: privilège 18 January, enregistrement 26 February¹²¹, achevé 6 March 1666.

As far as performance goes, Robinet, in his Lettre en vers of Saturday 16 January 1666, says that the play was given chez le duc de Créqui "samedy (i.e. 9 January), dans son beau Palais". It was performed by the Troupe Royale, i.e. the Hôtel de Bourgogne, "qui semble avoir le Vent en poupe". He then tells us that this poem "n'avoit point encore paru" - "given a public performance" or "given any performance"? Robinet, on Saturday 29 May 1666, gives an account of a - but not necessarily the first - performance at the Hôtel de Bourgogne the previous Tuesday and comments on the quality of the individual actors¹²².

Thomas, in his Au Lecteur, mentions the changes he has made to the historical account, and adds: "C'est à

119. See my article "Le rôle et les antécédents de l'Antiochus de Racine", Cahiers raciniens, XXI (1967), pp. 45-68.

120. History, vol. III, p. 532.

121. These are the dates shown in the Registre des privilèges, MS. B.N. f.fr. 21945, f^o 45 r^o. But in the first edition privilège extract, the privilège is dated 18 February and the enregistrement 19 February.

122. Lettres en vers, 16 January 1666, lines 81 and 86; 29 May 1666, lines 243-286.

vous à juger si j'ay bien ou mal réussi. La Pluspart des Auditeurs ont paru assez satisfaits de la representation de ce Poëme, & j'aurois mauvaise grace de regarder ceux qui s'y sont mal divertis, comme des Censeurs trop severes, ou des Critiques interessez."

20. Le Baron d'Albikrac.) As in the case of Stilicon
 21. Laodice.)

and Le Galand doublé, I have dealt elsewhere with the dating of Le Baron d'Albikrac and Laodice¹²³. Madame Chamoux's article in the R.H.L.F. of 1966 provided a useful opportunity for clarifying the chronological problems surrounding these two plays. But one point requires to be noted. Despite the clear statement in the privilège extract of both the Barbin and the Quinet 1669 first editions of the Baron that the licence to print was "enregistree sur le livre de la communauté le cinquième de mars 1668", this is not so. A minute scrutiny of the relevant register and in particular the entries for the two years 1668 and 1669¹²⁴ reveals no trace of privilèges for either Le Baron d'Albikrac or Laodice.

Le Baron was successfully revived at the Comédie-Française early in 1682, when it was played 17 times (including one performance each at St-Germain and St-Cloud); there are eight other performances recorded by La Grange between then and 1685. Mouhy comments in vol. III

123. Cf. note 74.

124. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21945, f^o 63 v^o - f^o 86 r^o.

of his Journal chronologique that "elle eut la reussite la plus soutenue et attira pendant longtemps les plus nombreuses assemblées: c'est une des pieces restées au theatre qui y a été reprise avec le plus de succez, et le plus souvent pendant plus de quarante ans"¹²⁵. It is still played from time to time, he indicates, writing in the middle of the eighteenth century.

22. La Mort d'Annibal. Th. Corneille's next play is La Mort d'Annibal, performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne on 25 November 1669 and printed the following year: privilege 27 February, enregistrement 13 March, achevé 12 April 1670. The play is dedicated to Monseigneur le marquis de Seignelay, secretaire d'Estat, i.e. Colbert's son. In the Epistre, Thomas Corneille mentions the changed taste in drama (the desire for "ces passions tumultueuses qui ébloüissent aujourd'huy la plupart de nos Auditeurs") and his fears for the success of the printed play. He hopes for consideration and thanks Colbert fils for his past help with plays (the son Jean-Baptiste, born in 1651, would only be in his late teens when addressed by Thomas): "Les justes remarques que vous avez faites sur ce que j'ay eu quelquefois l'honneur de vous lire, m'ont assez convaincu que c'est mettre son insuffisance en plein jour que d'exposer quelque Ouvrage à vostre jugement". His father, whom Thomas Corneille here describes as "ce grand Homme, qui dans l'accablement des emplois les plus relevez, & au

125. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9231, f^o 1245 r^o.

milieu de toute la gloire dont il est revestu, ne dédaigne pas celle de se déclarer Protecteur des beaux Arts & des plus nobles Sciences", had, seven years before, granted Thomas Corneille, "bon poëte français et dramatique", 1,000 livres - the same as he gave to de Pure, Molière, La Mothe Le Vayer, but less than P. Corneille (2,000 livres), Desmarets (1,200), Ménage (2,000), Huet (1,500), Cotin (1,200) and so on ¹²⁶.

Annibal had, according to Mouhy, only three performances. "A la dernière la salle étoit presque vuide." Later, he adds; "On attribua la chute de cette pièce aux épisodes inutiles dont le poète a affoibli l'intérêt de la pièce qui devoit n'avoir

126. J.C.F. Hoefer, Nouvelle biographie générale, Paris, 1855, vol. XI, pp. 107-108, note 3, s.v. Colbert.

pour objet qu'Annibal." Perhaps Thomas' fears were justified ¹²⁷.

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The remaining straight plays, no less interesting, can be dealt with more rapidly, as their chronology is better established.

23. La Comtesse d'Orgueil. This play, however, can only be dated 1670, as no relevant document has been found to pinpoint its first performance more closely.

127. MS. B.N.f.fr.9231, f^o 1245 r^o, f^o 1255 v^o. It is most probable that, like Camma and Stilicon, La Mort d'Annibal is the fruit of a suggestion originally made to Pierre Corneille. In 1668 Saint-Evremond writes to the comte de Lionne, saying that "je souhaite de tout mon coeur que (Pierre) Corneille traite le sujet d'Annibal" and recommending the pre-battle meeting with Scipio as a suitable episode. (Saint-Evremond, Lettres, ed. R. Ternois, Paris, 1967, vol. I, p. 137. Ternois dates the letter March-April 1668. Cf. my article "La Mort d'Annibal et Mithridate: deux aspects d'une hégémonie romaine", Jeunesse de Racine, April-June 1965, p. 33, note 32.)

In addition, there is an interesting, although inconclusive reference in Tallemant des Réaux to an unpublished play by Georges de Scudéry entitled Le Grand Annibal, performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1631 and re-staged in 1667, contemporary with Pierre's Attila. "Un peu après, ce pauvre homme (Scudéry) alla par malheur faire jouer une pièce de théâtre, appelée le Grand Annibal. Elle réussit si mal, qu'on luy pensa jeter des pommes, et on l'appelle en riant le Grand Animal de Scudéry, au lieu du Grand Annibal. Ses amys, ou plustost ceux de sa soeur, disent que cela vient d'une caballe de Corneille, qui estoit bien aise que l'Annibal de Scudery eust un pire succez que son Attila" (Historiettes, ed. G. Mongrédien, Paris, 1934, vol. VII, p. 45). Attila was first performed at the Palais-Royal on 4 March 1667 and printed in November. Scudéry himself died on 14 May 1667.

Mouhy's Journal¹²⁸, if it could be relied upon, might suggest October-November 1670, as the comedy occurs well down the chronological list of plays put on that year. The Epistre à Monsieur*** throws no light on the matter. Thomas Corneille talks here of "(les grâces) que vous m'avez déjà faites de la manière du monde la plus gracieuse, m'obligeant à une entière reconnaissance", also of "la dignité de vos Charges", and he ends by mentioning that "l'éclat avec lequel vous avez longtemps paru dans une des plus Augustes Compagnies de France redouble par le nouveau rang où vous venez de monter". Reynier and Deierkauf-Holsboer¹²⁹ situate the play at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, but here again, this is conjecture. A privilege was granted early in 1671 (21 January) and in the enregistrement, dated 7 February, it is stated that the play was performed at the Marais¹³⁰. The achevé dates from 7 March.

The comedy seems to have been a success, for Thomas mentions "l'approbation qu'elle a receuë au Theatre", although he talks of it as "une bagatelle à qui on a voulu faire grace". It was renewed momentarily at the Guénégaud on 22 and 25 June 1677¹³¹.

128. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9231, f^o 127⁴ v^o.

129. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 366; Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, p. 142.

130. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21945, f^o 100 v^o.

131. La Grange, Le Registre, ed. cit., p. 194.

24. Ariane. Between this play and Ariane there comes a break of some eighteen months, we must suppose, as the new tragedy was performed early in 1672. Mouhy, Parfaict and Reynier all quote 4 March 1672 as the date of the première at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, as does Mèlèse¹³². But this is probably a misreading of de Visé's Mercure galant of Saturday 5 March, because there the journalist says that he saw the play "Vendredy dernier" (p. 57). Had he meant the previous day, he would surely have said so; we must assume that the date is 26 February, as Lancaster, followed by Deierkauf-Holsboer, suggests¹³³. De Visé also informs us that the play was long awaited - hence the spare year 1671, since the completion of La Comtesse. In the Mercure galant of January 1710 (p.280), de Visé tells us that the tragedy was written in the country in a mere forty days; de Boze, in his Eloge of Thomas Corneille at the Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres after Easter 1710, brings this down to seventeen days. As with Attila, Ariane has its privilege (10 February 1672, registered on 31 March) before its first performance; the achevé is dated 8 April 1672 - not 23 July 1682 (sic), as quoted by Reynier¹³⁴. Ariane was played

132. Mouhy, MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 151; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. XI, p. 205; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 40; Mèlèse, Répertoire analytique, p.151.

133. Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 602, note 9; Deierkauf-Holsboer, Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, p. 145.

134. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 371.

at the Guénégaud ten times in 1679 and a further twenty-two times there and at the Comédie-Française, according to La Grange's Registre.

25. Théodat. Théodat came out later that same year, 1672. Mélése puts its first performance at the Hôtel de Bourgogne on 22 November (a Tuesday), but Robinet's Gazette of the previous Wednesday, 16 November, already has an account of the première¹³⁵. The Mercure galant of 30 July-6 August 1672 had announced the play as forthcoming, calling it Cléodat, and had said it would be at the Hôtel de Bourgogne almost simultaneously with the Pulchérie of P. Corneille being mounted at the Marais. The same Mercure of June 1673 mentions the failure of the play, due to a cabale: "Cet ouvrage aurait eu un très grand succès, si la Fortune avait été un effet du mérite; mais comme ce ne sont plus les ouvrages qui cabalent, il ne faut pas s'étonner si cette pièce, qui a eu l'approbation des meilleurs connaisseurs, n'a pas été aussi suivie que les autres du même auteur". Certainly, it was printed relatively soon after performance (privilege 31 December 1672; enregistrement 5 January 1673; achevé 23 January 1673) - but then so were some of Thomas' more successful plays. The Au Lecteur is no help here: it merely accounts for the choice and adaptation of the characters.

In the summer of 1673, the Marais and Molière's for-

135. This was not held that day, though, as Deierkauf-Holsboer (Le théâtre de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, vol. II, p. 145) suggests.

mer company fused; most of Th. Corneille's remaining plays (with the notable exception of Le Comte d'Essex) are at the resultant Guénégaud theatre and at the Comédie-Française from 1680 onwards. Now in this last part of his career, Thomas collaborates with de Visé and Montfleury, puts Molière into verse, and produces prose comedies. Indeed, the link with de Visé the dramatist precedes collaboration in the Mercure galant; Thomas Corneille is, on 15 December 1681, formally associated with de Visé, who founded the journal in 1672, although we know that he helped with this valuable monthly as early as 1677, when it was revived after a three-year silence.

26. Le Comédien poète. Le Comédien poète, a comedy written in collaboration with Montfleury, appeared at the Guénégaud on 10 November 1673 and was printed shortly afterwards. The first edition, crediting Montfleury alone with the work (as does La Grange's Registre¹³⁶), has a permission from La Reynie on p. 120, dated 6 March 1674, but no achevé d'imprimer. The Gazette d'Amsterdam of 28 April 1674, however, in an item from Paris dated 20 April, mentions publication and the availability of copies at Pierre Promé, the Paris bookseller on the quai des Grands Augustins. The play was performed eighteen times consecutively, from 10 November to 22 December 1673, according to the Registre, then six times in 1674 (February, March and October), three

136. Ed. cit., vol. I, p. 153.

in 1675, four times in 1676, three times in 1678, twice in 1679, thrice in 1682, and once in both 1683 and 1684.

What proof is there that Thomas Corneille collaborated? Parfaict¹³⁷ believes so, and quotes the Registre journalier de Guénégaud, showing payment to both men¹³⁸. Reynier does not dispute the fact, nor does Lancaster; Mélése, in his Répertoire, is unsure¹³⁹. But the evidence seems strong enough. There is no prefatory material to cast further light.

27. La Mort d'Achille. Shortly after Le Comédien poète, the Guénégaud put on Thomas' La Mort d'Achille, on 29 December 1673. The play was published the following year, but the first edition is no longer available¹⁴⁰. The Mercure galant for December 1673¹⁴¹ claims that, in pre-performance readings, the tragedy was judged to be better than Ariane - a claim which is unlikely, to say the least. It had eight performances at the Guénégaud, from 29 December 1673 to 14 January 1674; one must doubt the

137. Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. XI, p.330.

138. Cf. Young in La Grange, Le Registre, ed. cit., vol. II, p. 121.

139. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 45; Lancaster, History, vol. IV, pp. 417-418; Mélése, Répertoire analytique, p. 157

140. However, the privilege register of 24 March 1674 (MS. B.N. f.fr. 21946, f^o 5) notes a privilege given to Claude Barbin for six years on 13 March 1674 (or it may be 15 March - the writing is almost indecipherable).

141. Vol. VI, p. 248.

Youngs' assertion¹⁴² that the play "réussit selon le Registre, malgré certains historiens pour lesquels cette pièce fut un four", unless success can be equated with average takings of just over 600 livres at each performance, rather than a lengthy run. Mouhy¹⁴³ says that Th. Corneille submitted the play to M. le duc de Richelieu, who thought it excellent; but the parterre disapproved of it, and Mouhy suggests that there is a moral in this!

28. Dom César d'Avalos. A year after La Mort d'Achille, the comedy Dom César d'Avalos appeared, performed at the Guénégaud on 21 December 1674, but not published until 1676 (the Gazette d'Amsterdam of 27 February 1676 has what Mélése¹⁴⁴ calls a "publicité élogieuse pour l'édition"). Once again, the first edition is not available. Reynier¹⁴⁵ says the play, "composée en toute hâte, sur la demande des comédiens, que de graves difficultés avaient empêchés de préparer pour l'hiver un spectacle plus important", had fifteen performances, but La Grange's Registre shows a total of sixteen, spread between 21 December 1674 and 22 January 1675, with a final two on 15 and 17 May 1676. Reynier's assertions about the haste with which the play was written are based on no worthy evidence.

142. La Grange, Le Registre, ed. cit., vol. II, p. 28.

143. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9231, r^o 1322 v^o.

144. Répertoire analytique, p. 161.

145. Thomas Corneille, p. 45.

29. Circé.) With Circé and L'Inconnu of 1675, we
 30. L'Inconnu.)
 move on to the pièces ornées de spectacles. The first edition of Circé describes the play as a "tragédie ornée de machines, de changemens de theatre & de musique" (music by Charpentier), and the play is preceded by an Argument-type preface. The work is based on the first fable of the 14th book of Ovid's Metamorphoses; Thomas had begun to publish a translation of the early books of the Metamorphoses in 1670 and will complete the task in 1697. Collaboration with de Visé is generally suggested for each of these plays; de Visé in the Mercure galant of January 1710, says he only prepared the divertissemens for Circé, while La Grange mentions only Th. Corneille for that play¹⁴⁶. For L'Inconnu, the Registre specifies joint authorship ("Mon^r de l'Isle & de Vizé").

Circé is first put on at the Guénégaud in March 1675 and runs for 76 performances between 17 March and 5 April, then, after the Easter closure, from 23 April to 15 October virtually uninterrupted, although from late May onwards other plays (Le Clerc's Iphigénie, Tartuffe, L'Avare and so on) occasionally break the run. De Visé, in the January 1710 Mercure, says enthusiastically, if slightly inaccurately, that the play ran non-stop from the beginning of Lent till the month of September; he adds, too, that the success would have been even greater "si les

146. Mercure galant, January 1710, p. 284; La Grange, Le Registre, ed. cit., p. 190.

interests d'un Particulier n'en eussent point fait retrancher les voix". For the first six weeks, de Visé claims, the theatre was full at noon, and tickets were being sold on the black market¹⁴⁷. Clearly, it was a great success, and Thomas acknowledges and explains this at the end of the preface: "Le succès en a esté grand, & il ne s'en faut pas étonner, puisque'on n'a rien vue jusqu'icy de si beau, ny de si surprenant, que les Machines qui en ont fait le principal ornement." The Gazette d'Amsterdam, in its issue of 14 February 1675, contains a report from Paris attesting to the excitement caused by the advance publicity. "Les Comédiens du Faubourg S. Germain doivent représenter sur la fin du Carneval une Piece à machines intitulée Circé; Elle est du fameux Corneille (sic), & les machines sont du Marquis de Sourdiac qui donna la Toison d'or au mariage du Roy. Les mouvemens des vols & des machines de cete derniere sont si extraordinaires qu'ils passent l'imagination. On attend cete Piece avec tant d'impatience que toutes les places sont déjà louées pour plusieurs representations, & beaucoup d'étrangers different leur depart pour la voir." The first nine performances were given "au double" and netted an average of some 2,650 livres; even the dozen or so which followed the Easter break averaged 1,100 livres each, a quite exceptional total for the time. Yet the cost and problems of mounting such a spectacle caused considerable diffi-

147. Mercure galant, January 1710, pp. 285-286.

culties and bad feeling, as recorded by La Grange¹⁴⁸. As early as 12 October 1674, La Grange states that the play will be performed "incessamment", but it is not until after a performance of L'Avare on 26 February 1675 that rehearsals and preparations for Circé can begin in earnest; they will last two and half weeks until the première.

Some confusion has arisen over the printing of the text of Circé, perhaps understandably so. The B.N. contains copies of two 1675 editions, one a 4^o volume of 51 pages printed by Pierre Bessin (Yf 701) and the other a 12^o volume of iv + 136 pages, brought out by Pierre Promé (Yf 7830). The Bessin edition has a privilege of 28 February 1675 (for Circé avec le Dessein) and an achevé of 14 March 1675; it is enregistré on 29 March 1675¹⁴⁹. This has led some critics to say that the play was printed before its first performance. In fact, the 4^o edition has the décorations for the prologue and the five acts, the text of the prologue, but only a prose summary of each of the acts themselves. The décorations for the prologue, acts II, IV and V are slightly different in wording from those in the 12^o edition. The main feature of the Bessin edition, though, is the Argument, much longer than in the Promé one. The first paragraph - omitted later - gives the reason for the performance of Circé - the king's recent victories -, justifies the machines and says that "tout y est grand, tout y est nécessaire". The paragraph ends

148. Le Registre, ed. cit., vol. I, pp.163-169; vol. II, pp. 28-30.

149. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21946, f^o 16.

by mentioning the source of the play: the 14th book of Ovid's Metamorphoses.

Pierre Promé's 12^o edition, with a privilege of 28 February (for Circé alone) and an achevé of 17 May 1675, contains the full verse text of five acts, divided into scenes, with, as in the Bessin edition, a note on the decoration of each act and the decoration and text of the prologue. In addition, Promé provides a list of the dramatis personae. The Argument omits the opening paragraph of the earlier edition, and on to the end of the second paragraph Thomas has now added: "Le succès en a esté si grand, & il ne s'en faut étonner, puis qu'on n'a rien vu jusqu'icy de si beau, ny de si surprenant, que les Machines, qui en ont fait le principal ornement".

The actual text of Circé is thus printed some two months after the first performance; even Lancaster, who is careful to distinguish two editions, gets his dates mixed up¹⁵⁰. In the autumn of 1675, the Gazette de France states that "Hier, Monsieur & Madame, accompagnez de Mademoiselle & de grand nombre de Dames, vinrent icy (à Paris), prendre le divertissement de la Tragédie de Circé, composee par le sieur de Corneille le jeune: & Leurs Altesses Royales furent merveilleusement satisfaites de ce beau Spectacle, dont les Décorations, les vols, & les Machines sont extraordinaires"¹⁵¹.

150. History, vol. IV, p. 909, note 1.

151. Gazette de France, 5 October 1675, p. 738.

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Shortly after this, L'Inconnu, a "comédie meslée d'ornemens & de musique", appeared at the Guénégaud, on 17 November 1675, and was published at the same time (privi-
lège 14 November 1675; like Ariane, its privi-
lège is granted shortly before performance and is registered on 15 January 1676). The achevé of the first edition is dated 17 January 1676; the Gazette d'Amsterdam of 27 February 1676 mentions the play being on sale in Paris, along with Dom César d'Avalos. The same journal, in its issue of 5 December 1675, says, in a dispatch from Paris dated 29 November, that "le Livre du sujet de cete grande Piece se vend au Palais & dans la Sale de la Comedie".

It appears that L'Inconnu was completed fairly hastily, for in the Au Lecteur Thomas says that "vous ne trouverez point ces grandes Intrigues qui ont accoutumé de faire le noeud des Comédies de cette nature, parce que les Ornaments qu'on m'a prestez demandant beaucoup de temps, n'ont pû souffrir que j'aye poussé ce Sujet dans toute son étendue"¹⁵². Le Mercure galant of January 1710 explains why: de Visé wrote L'Inconnu in prose, and then Th. Corneille put it into verse. "(Comme) il y avait des raisons pour donner promptement cette pièce au public (i.e., in order to cash in on the success of Circé, whose initial run ended in mid-October), ... pour avancer, je fis toute la pièce en prose, et pendant que je faisais la prose du se-

152. My italics.

cond acte, il mettait celle du premier acte en vers; et comme la prose est plus facile que les vers, j'eus le temps de faire ceux des divertissements, et surtout le dialogue de l'Amour et de l'Amitié, qui n'a pas déplu au public"¹⁵³. This must have been useful practice for the versifying of Molière's Dom Juan, which will probably be Thomas Corneille's next task, even although it is preceded on stage by Le Triomphe des Dames.

De Visé, in the Mercure galant, organised extensive publicity for the revivals of both Circé and L'Inconnu in the following years, thereby attesting to their popularity. Certainly, L'Inconnu was successful, if rather less so than Circé; it was, according to La Grange, played thirty-two times at the Guénégaud in its first season, three times in the early summer of 1676, then, after a two and a half year break, thirty times between January 1679 and March 1684 at the Guénégaud and the Comédie-Française, including a performance at Versailles in May 1681. The Mercure galant for January 1679 comments, for example: "la Troupe du Roy qui joue au Fauxbourg S. Germain, a remis pour nouveauté l'Inconnu, de M^r de Corneille le jeune. Cette galante Piece a des agrémens si particuliers, qu'en commence d'y courir en foule, comme on faisoit il y a trois ans: le cinquième Acte en est changé, & a esté pris d'une autre Piece du mesme Auteur, qui n'ayant aucune part à ce changement, ne doit pas répondre du manque de justesse qui

153. Mercure galant, January 1710, pp. 283-284.

s'y peut trouver."

Of the remaining plays, we have only the libretti for Le Triomphe des Dames, published in 1676 and for La Pierre philosophaie, published in 1681¹⁵⁴.

31. Le Triomphe des Dames. Le Triomphe des Dames was performed at the Guénégaud on 7 August 1676 and had a reasonable success: twenty-six performances in all in that calendar year, eleven between 7 August and 4 September, then fifteen from 20 November to 27 December. The play is entitled a "comédie meslée d'ornemens, avec l'explication du combat à la Barrière & de toutes les Devises". It has an Au Lecteur-type preface which explains the reference to the barrière in act V.

Between Le Triomphe des Dames and La Pierre philosophaie came three plays, each in its own way successful and interesting: Le Festin de Pierre, Le Comte d'Essex and La Devineresse.

32. Le Festin de Pierre. This adaptation has been adequately dealt with elsewhere, in books on Molière in general and on his Don Juan in particular. It appeared on 12 February 1677, at the Guénégaud, but was only published in 1683 - privilège 14 March, enregistrement 23 March, achevé 30 March. In the meantime it had been moderately successful, no more: the Avis from the bookseller mentions several

154. These libretti are also to be found in Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. XI, pp. 457-490 and vol. XII, pp. 225-265 respectively

performances a year, and the fact that the play is always presented in Molière's own name. We know from La Grange's Registre, whose entries end in August 1685, that it had six performances before the Easter closure in March 1677, eleven more during the 1677-8 season and an average of five or six performances a year after that. By 1683, its popularity was clearly waning. In the first edition, the only indication of authorship is a "T.C." in the privilège.

Lancaster¹⁵⁵ assumes that the play was completed no later than 1676, probably after Le Triomphe des Dames, which occupied the Guénégaud stage in late November and for virtually all December. January 1677 saw Pradon's Phèdre et Hippolyte rivalling Racine's tragedy, and Le Festin de Pierre followed immediately after the Pradon play had run its short course.

33. Le Comte d'Essex. The second of the three plays mentioned in this category is Le Comte d'Essex, for which Thomas momentarily moved back to the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Because of this, the exact dating of the tragedy is a little more difficult. The Mercure galant of 31 January 1678 gives an account of the première and notes its success, despite yet another cabale: "Elle (La pièce) a déjà cousté bien des larmes à de beaux yeux, & c'est une assez forte marque de son succès. Ce n'est pas qu'elle ait eu la destinée de tous les Ouvrages qui ont le

155. Lancaster, History, vol. IV, p. 439, note 8.

mieux réussy ... Une douzaine de Vers qu'on a prétendu estre négligez, a fait dire aux uns & aux autres, qu'il (le comte d'Essex) seroit encor plus promptement condamné en France, qu'il ne l'avoit esté autrefois en Angleterre. On l'a publié, on l'a écrit en Province. Cependant les grandes Assemblées y continuent, & il n'y a pas d'apparence qu'on les voye si tost cesser"¹⁵⁶. The play was thus probably played in early January, perhaps 7 January, as Mouhy and Lancaster suggest; this was a Friday, the traditional day for first performances and would coincide with the promise that the play would be ready for "le lendemain des Rois sans remise"¹⁵⁷. The Mercure galant (*ibid.*) also mentions the play's success "par quelques Lectures". This would suggest completion a number of weeks before, at least; Lancaster's guess of early November seems quite plausible¹⁵⁸. Yet, despite the number of subsequent performances, a privilège was taken on 8 February 1678 (but only enregistré on 21 February)¹⁵⁹ and the achevé d'imprimer is dated 17 February 1678.

The subject of the play, according to the Au Lecteur, "semble n'avoir point déplû, & la matiere est si heureuse par la pitié qui en est inséparable, qu'elle n'a pas

156. Mercure galant, 31 January 1678, pp. 157-158.

157. Mercure galant, December 1677, p. 164.

158. History, vol. IV, p. 148

159. MS. B.N. f.fr. 21946, f^o 68.

laissé examiner mes fautes avec toute la sévérité que j'avois à craindre".

34. La Devineresse. Finally, there is La Devineresse ou les faux Enchantements, a comedy written in conjunction with de Visé and performed at the Guénégaud on 19 November 1679. The play had been announced in the Mercure galant of October 1679¹⁶⁰ in the following terms: "La mesme Troupe ("la belle & grande Troupe du Roy du Fauxbourg S. Germain") doit faire paroistre en suite la nouvelle Piece qu'elle promet depuis quelque temps, intitulée la Devineresse. On l'attend avec d'autant plus d'impatience, que ce Titre excite la curiosité de toute (sic) le monde, & que le Théâtre François imite parfaitement la Nature." The following month, de Visé comments sagely on the uselessness of fortune-tellers ("Femmes de rien, & par conséquent tres-ignorantes") and adds: "on ne doit pas estre surpris des grandes Assemblées qu'elle attire, puis qu'elle est fort réjouissante d'elle-mesme, & qu'elle apprend à se garantir des pièges de tous les Diseurs de bonne aventure"¹⁶¹. Already in the August 1679 issue, the Mercure had mentioned the forthcoming play: "Je ne sçay pas bien encor ce que c'est; mais de la maniere qu'on m'en a parlé le spectacle de cette Piece approche fort des choses surprenantes que je vous viens de conter. Si cela est, il vaudra bien les Machines ordinaires"¹⁶².

160. Mercure galant, October 1679, 1ère partie, p. 179.

161. Mercure galant, 30 November 1679, pp. 168-170.

162. P. 25.

The Mercure galant of January 1710 says that de Visé thought up scenes - enough for three or four plays on the subject -, gave the material to Thomas Corneille and with it "Corneille composa un sujet"¹⁶³. There were forty-seven consecutive performances (not forty-five, as usually stated)¹⁶⁴, from 19 November 1679 to 10 March 1680, a good number for the period, and a handful in the years following - but, by its very nature, La Devineresse is more a pièce d'actualité than most. The Au Lecteur testifies to its success: "Le succès de cette Comédie a esté si grand, qu'il s'en est peu veu de semblables. On y a couru, & on y court encor tous les jours en foule." Thomas Corneille adds that his aim has been to "instruire en divertissant", but warns that "il est pourtant vray (& on se croit obligé de la protester) qu'on n'a eu aucune veuë particuliere en faisant la Piece".

Both the privilège (1 February 1680) and the achevé (14 February 1680, like the enregistrement) anticipate the end of the play's run by several weeks. Thomas explains why, in the Au Lecteur: "Comme beaucoup de Gens assurent toujours qu'ils ont déjà veu la Devineresse imprimée, & que cette Impression ne peut estre qu'imparfaite & pleine de fautes; pour connoistre la veritable, il faut regarder si le titre de la première Page, & les mots de Scene, sont formez de lettres figurées telles qu'on les trouve icy."

163. Pp. 281-282.

164. E.g. most recently by Y. Giraud in his edition of Timocrate, Geneva/Paris, 1970, p. 15

35. La Pierre philosopale. La Pierre philosopale, performed at the Comédie-Française on Sunday 23 February 1681, with only one other performance two days later, when receipts fell from 1,794 to 398 livres, is another prose comedy, a "comédie mêlée de spectacles", as the title-page states. The libretto has no author's name, an unsigned Au Lecteur, and only a permis d'imprimer (dated 12 February 1681), hence no identifying privilège name. La Grange indicates that the play was written by Th. Corneille in collaboration with de Visé, and this is accepted by Tralage in his Recueil of 1696 and by Lancaster; there is, though, no firm evidence¹⁶⁵. Mélése says that La Pierre philosopale was played at the Comédie-Française, Reynier¹⁶⁶ and Lancaster opt for the Guénégaud. Clearly, the latter two are mistaken. In his History, Lancaster dates performance correctly as 23 and 25 February 1681, but in his List of plays 1673-1700, he quotes the month wrongly as February 1680¹⁶⁷. The Comédie-Française came into being on 21 October 1680 with the merger of the Guénégaud and the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

36. L'Usurier. The remaining straight plays include L'Usurier, another prose comedy, written again in colla-

165. La Grange, Le Registre, ed. cit., p. 257; Lancaster, History, vol. IV, p. 920.

166. Mélése, Répertoire analytique, p. 172; Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 367.

167. Lancaster, History, vol. IV, pp. 920 and 952.

boration with de Visé, as La Grange indicates¹⁶⁸, performed at the Comédie-Française on 13 February 1685, according to the Registre, and subsequently eight times till 10 March 1685, but not published. The frères Parfaict¹⁶⁹ reproduce extracts from the Mercure galant of January and February 1685, the first announcing the play, the second defending it against attacks. The two brothers, claiming that the authorship of the comedy cannot be determined (de Visé certainly never reveals his own collaboration), end their item on L'Usurier thus: "Ce discours (de Visé's defence of the play) est pitoyable, c'est un pur galimathias d'un bout à l'autre. L'éloge de la Pièce y est aussi mal fait que la défense: mais n'importe, ces passages sont instructifs, & apprennent des détails curieux ..." Mouhy comments that L'Usurier is "la premiere Piece, ou il parut un Abbé sur le Théâtre. Le Parterre en murmura. La cabale des gens de cette robe nuisit beaucoup et empescha son succez"¹⁷⁰.

The play is announced in January 1685¹⁷¹ for "un des premiers jours de la semaine prochaine" and an account is given in the Nouvelles nouvelles in Leyden on 6 February 1685. This dispatch, dated from Paris 30 January, runs: "L'on joue ici une pièce qui fait bruit: le titre de l'Usurier qu'elle porte cache celui de banquier". If

168. Le Registre, ed. cit., p. 346.

169. Histoire du théâtre français, vol. XII, pp. 457-461.

170. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9235, f^o 1263.

171. Mercure galant, p. 333.

L'Usurier is already successful in late January, the Comédie-Française date of 13 February must be wrong; but the Nouvelles nouvelles may just be reporting the announcement in the January issue of the Mercure galant, as the latter's terms are somewhat similar: "Cè qui fait l'agrément de cette Comédie, qui peut être aussitôt appelée le Banquier, que l'Usurier, ..." As the play itself is lost, not much can be done to rectify the details, although La Grange, noting details of each play performance by performance, would seem a far more reliable guide than the popular chroniclers of the time.

37. Le Baron des Fondrières. This play, a prose comedy, receives only one performance at the Comédie-Française, on 14 January 1686, and is not published. Mouhy¹⁷² suggests that this was the first play to be sifflée by the parterre; until then, patrons had either yawned or blown their noses!

38. Bradamante. Almost ten years later, Bradamante is brought out at the Comédie-Française on 18 November 1695 and printed shortly afterwards: privilège 20 December 1695, enregistrement 24 December, achevé 5 January 1696¹⁷³. Mélése again makes the authorship a joint one, de Visé and Thomas Corneille; the title-page only bears the latter's

172. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9231, f^o 1520 v^o.

173. These, at least, are the dates given in the printed extract in the first edition. The privilège register entry is almost unreadable, but there the privilège date looks more like 23 December than 20 December, and the enregistrement could read 29 rather than 24 December.

name, although this is not conclusive proof, of course¹⁷⁴. The privilège, too, is in Th. Corneille's name alone. The Au Lecteur explains the circumstances surrounding the presentation of Bradamante: "Il y a plus de quinze ans que cette Piece auroit paru au Theatre, si je n'eusse pas appréhendé que la réputation de l'Arioste, tout fameux qu'il est, n'eust pas esté d'un assez grand poids, pour autoriser l'incident sur lequel toute l'oeconomie en est fondée ... Si j'ay pû chercher à me satisfaire en composant cet Ouvrage, j'ay peut-estre eu tort de l'exposer au Public, puisqu'il pouvoit n'estre pas du goust de tout le monde ...; mais c'est une faute que mes Amis m'ont fait faire ... S'il est un âge qui semble permettre ces sortes d'amusemens, il en est un autre qui demande que l'on songe à la retraite." Thomas was 70 on 20 August 1695.

The play had twelve performances, according to Parfaict¹⁷⁵, the last being on 20 December 1695, the day of the privilège, and an initial success. The abbé Bordelon, in his Diversités curieuses of 1696, says that "La Tragedie de Bradamante de Mr. T. Corneille, dont vous avez vû la premiere Representation, a eu assez de succès; elle en auroit eu davantage, si les combats de femmes contre des hommes estoient de nostre goust; & si l'Auteur avoit voulu s'écarter un peu de l'Histoire de l'Arioste, c'est-à-dire,

174. Mèlèse, Répertoire analytique, p. 201.

175. Histoire du théâtre français, vol. XIII, p. 429.

faire combattre Roger contre Leon, en luy déclarant qui il estoit, les Spectateurs auroient esté plus contens"¹⁷⁶.

Lastly, with regard to the straight plays, there is the question of Les Dames vengées, attributed by most critics¹⁷⁷ to Thomas Corneille and de Visé - an attribution rejected by Lancaster¹⁷⁸. The play was performed on 22 February 1695 at the Comédie-Française, where it had fifteen performances in all between then and 24 April. Publication came the same year: privilège 17 April, enregistrement 23 April, achevé 22 April (sic). It sports an Au Lecteur and an Epistre to the Dauphin. There is no author's name on the privilège and none on the title-page; the Epistre is signed D., but there is nothing about the author in the Au Lecteur.

It seems clear that Thomas Corneille can have had little, if anything, to do with the play. The Gazette d'Amsterdam of 17 February 1695, in a report from Paris dated 11 February, announces the play as forthcoming and says it is believed to be "de l'auteur du Mercure galant". Donneau de Visé, as I mentioned, founded the Mercure in 1672, and Thomas Corneille only collaborated officially from 1681 onwards. As for the text of the Epistre, it is obvious that this is not Thomas speaking to the Dauphin:

176. 1704 edition "suivant la copie imprimée à Paris", vol. VI, p. 146, letter XVI.

177. E.g. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 367; Mélése, Répertoire analytique, p. 197.

178. History, vol. IV, p. 842, note 16

"J'ose me flater que vous aurez les mêmes bontez pour cette Comedie que pour mes autres Ouvrages, qui sont depuis dix-neuf ans sous vôtre protection ... Je ne repeteray point icy, MONSEIGNEUR, ce qui a fait une des plus belles parties du grand nombre de volumes que vous m'avez permis de vous offrir ..." ¹⁷⁹.

33a. Psyché)

33b. Bellérophon)

37b. Médée)

One must say a final word about the opéras or tragédies lyriques, especially Psyché, Bellérophon and Médée. The first two are usually said to have been written in collaboration with Fontenelle, and with music by Lulli; the last by Thomas Corneille alone, with music by Charpentier.

Psyché was performed at the Académie de Musique on 19 April 1678, after only three weeks' preparation of verse and music, according to the Mercure galant ¹⁸⁰. The play was printed in 1678 - no author's name on the title-page, no privilège, permis or achevé.

Bellérophon was written for "le Roy, ayant donné la Paix à l'Europe" (Au Lecteur), i.e. by the Treaties of Nijmegen, concluded in August and September 1678, and performed on 31 January 1679. It was a great success. Reynier

179. Cf. P. Mélése, Donneau de Visé, Paris, 1936, pp. 207-215.

180. April 1678, p. 194.

and Collins mention the collaboration of Boileau, as does Mélése¹⁸¹. Fontenelle, in a letter to the Journal des Savants in 1741, denies that Boileau wrote anything more than the Prologue, a part of act IV and the canevas, "ce qu'on appelle dans les Opera canevas, de petits vers faits sur les airs & qu'on met dans les Divertissements"¹⁸².

Active joint authorship by Boileau and Th. Corneille would appear improbable, if only in view of the former's scathing remarks, as reported by Monchesnay in the Bolaeana:

"C'est un homme, disoit-il (of Th. Corneille), emporté de l'enthousiasme d'autrui, & qui n'a jamais pu rien faire de raisonnable: vous diriez qu'il ne s'est étudié qu'à copier les défauts de son frère ... Ah! pauvre Thomas, continuoit Monsieur Despréaux, tes vers comparés avec ceux de ton frère aîné font bien voir que tu n'es qu'un cadet de Normandie"¹⁸³.

In the Mercure galant of 1679, Donneau de Visé makes no mention of Th. Corneille's name in connection with Bellérophon. The January 1679 issue (dated 31 January, the day of the first performance) mentions the crowd and adds: "Chacun convient que M^r de Lully s'est surpassé luy-mesme, & que ce dernier Ouvrage est son Chef d'oeuvre". De Visé

181. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 57ff; Collins, Thomas Corneille, p. 191; P. Mélése, Le théâtre et le public à Paris sous Louis XIV, p. 107.

182. Fontenelle, OEuvres, Paris, Saillant, 1767, vol. III, pp. 366-378.

183. J. Losme de Monchesnay, Bolaeana, Amsterdam, Lhonoré, 1742, pp. 129-130.

himself attended the thirtieth performance on 19 March 1679: "le plaisir que j'y reçeus m'empêcha d'estre surpris du grand monde que j'y trouvay. Ce n'est point ce qu'on appelle Chansonnetes qu'il y attire. Elles y sont en fort petit nombre, la grandeur du Sujet n'ayant pû souffrir que l'Autheur soit sorty de sa matiere"¹⁸⁴. But some thirty years later, when writing his friend's Eloge, de Visé attributes Bellérophon to Thomas Corneille and adds that it was played "pendant prés d'une année entiere". It was, too, the first work of its kind to have "un sujet aussi plein & aussi intrigué"¹⁸⁵.

Now this statement by de Visé would seem to clear up all doubts about who wrote Bellérophon. Given the circumstances surrounding the January 1710 Mercure article, and also de Visé's selectiveness in mentioning Thomas' works, it is clear that little attention should be paid to an account by Fontenelle, according to which his uncle got a stand-in to do his part. Thomas, recounts Fontenelle, was approached by Lulli, who asked him to write an opéra, while allowing him (Lulli) to approach Boileau "pour tâcher de lui fermer enfin la bouche". "M. Corneille ne goûtoit pas trop cette sorte de travail," continues Fontenelle, "il s' avisa de mettre en sa place, mais sans en rien dire, un jeune homme qui étoit en Province. Il lui envoya le Plan

184. Mercure galant, January 1679, p. 181; March 1679, pp. 95-96.

185. Mercure galant, January 1710, p. 287.

de Bellerophon, qui avoit été montré à M. Despreaux, & où il est vrai que le nom du Magicien Amisodar, qui est heureux & sonore, fut fourni par lui. Le jeune Auteur exécuta tout ce Plan dans sa Province, & il ne toucha pas aux Canevas, qui ne pouvoient se faire qu'à Paris de concert avec le Musicien ... Tout le reste est de lui seul, hormis les endroits qui ont été marqués..."¹⁸⁶.

The play, according to the title-page of the first edition, was printed in 1679, although the Avertissement sur l'impression de ce Livre in the 1728 edition has the words: "Ces Paroles (on the early performances) ayant été imprimées dès l'Année 1680, par exprès Commandement de Sa Majesté; on peut se persuader que le Public en revera l' Edition avec plaisir...."

Thirdly, Médée, "tragédie en musique", performed on 4 December 1693 and printed the same year, The Mercure galant comments that "l'Opera de Médée et celui de Bellérophon du mesme Auteur, sont aussi remplis de sujet qu'aucune autre pièce de Théâtre que nous ayons", but to judge from contemporary chansonniers (quoted by Mélése), the work was not a long-lasting success¹⁸⁷.

37a. Orion. A final brief note must be devoted to a work by Thomas Corneille, a mention of which I have only

186. Fontenelle, OEuvres, Paris, Saillant, 1767, vol. III, p. 369.

187. Mercure galant, December 1693, p. 331; P. Mélése, Le théâtre et le public à Paris sous Louis XIV, p. 266, note 1.

recently discovered. In his Journal chronologique du théâtre français¹⁸⁸, the chevalier de Mouhy mentions, under the date 1683, a "tragedy" by Thomas Corneille entitled Orion. According to this rather unreliable eighteenth-century cataloguer, the Comédie-Française had read the play, but rejected it as not being up to Thomas' usual standards. To judge from the subject-matter, the work was presumably a tragédie lyrique.

The Comédie-Française archives contain no trace of an Orion manuscript, but Madame Sylvie Chevalley, archiviste-bibliothécaire, has kindly drawn my attention to a note concerning the play. In the Catalogue des pièces présentées à la lecture des Comédiens français, there figures the following text, part of the minutes of the tenth "Assemblée des Comédiens" on Monday 4 January 1683: "On a Resolu de rendre response a Mons^r de l Isle sur sa piece d'Orion et de luy faire dire que la Compagnie ne croit pas que cette piece luy fist honneur comme beaucoup dautres qu'il a faittes et quelle le prie de faire reflexion sur ce sentiment de sa Comedie. La Compagnie estant dans le dessein de luy faire plaisir en nexposant pas cette piece."

From the above text, it would appear that only certain actors had given the play a preliminary reading, and that it had never been brought before the whole company¹⁸⁹.

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188. MS. B.N. f.fr. 9231, f^o 1453 r^o.

189. Since the above was written, the minute extract has been published by Madame Chevalley in her Album du théâtre classique, Paris, 1970, p. 235.

What conclusions can we draw from this attempt to ascertain the dates of performance and publication in Thomas Corneille? Firstly, we must note the variety of his output which, coupled with its quantity, establishes Thomas as an author worthy of examination, if not always of praise. He produced 38 plays, ranging from comedies adapted from the Spanish through tragi-comedy (Timocrate, 1656) and machine-plays to great tragedy, as in Stilicon (1660), Laodice (1668), Ariane (1672) and Le Comte d'Essex (1678). In addition, there are his tragédies lyriques Psyché and Bellérophon, together with the enigmatic Orion mentioned by the actors of the Comédie-Française. The overall range of interest is matched by an equally disconcerting juxtaposition of different types of play: Timocrate and La Mort de Commode in 1656 and 1657, Le Galand doublé and Stilicon in 1660, Le Baron d'Albikrac and Laodice in 1667 and 1668, La Comtesse d'Orgeuil and Ariane in 1670 and 1672, to name but a few. Two-thirds of all this output was Thomas' alone, and when, in the early seventies, he did come to collaborate with others - Donneau de Visé in particular -, it was for two reasons. The nature of the spectacles he chose to write demanded a variety of talents, musical and otherwise, as we have seen; and from the mid-seventies, he was increasingly involved in writing and selling the Mercure galant, which occupied him until the end of the century.

Additionally, during the mid and late sixties, he must have been working on the first part of his verse

translation of the Metamorphoses, books I and II appearing in 1670 and V and VI in 1672; all fifteen are published towards the end of his life, in 1697. Work on the Ovid translation may well explain the gap in dramatic production between the performance of Pyrrhus at the end of 1663 and that of Antiochus early in 1666, and again between Laodice, staged in February 1668, and La Mort d'Annibal, which appeared in November 1669.

The end of Thomas' active dramatic career in the early 1680s coincided with the increased responsibilities to the Mercure inherent in the contrat d'association passed between himself and D. de Visé in December 1681 and made legally binding the following month. As early as 1678, the Mercure's editors are forced to state categorically that contributions must be properly presented and that no correspondence can be entered into ("On ne fait réponse à personne, faute de temps", runs a solemn Avis pour toujours after the October 1678 issue). In these years, too, there began his new activities as a scholar, Academician and dictionary-compiler: his remarks on Vaugelas appear in 1687, his two massive dictionaries, the Dictionnaire des termes d'art et de science and the Dictionnaire universel géographique et historique are published in 1694 and 1708 respectively, and Donneau de Visé informs us that notes had been completed and a second edition of the Dictionnaire universel was being actively prepared by Thomas at the time

of his death in December 1709¹⁹⁰. The latter work, all 2,500 double-columned folio pages of it, was the fruit, the author tells us in the preface, of "plus de quinze années d'un travail très-assidu, & presque sans aucun relasche". It is fashionable to decry these last two compilations by pointing out their deficiencies, the inaccuracies in them, and so on. They fall outside the scope of the present study; suffice to say that they show Thomas' industry and considerable talent continuing at a high pitch until he was in his early 80s and going blind.

A second conclusion we must draw from our enquiry into dating and performance is that Thomas Corneille's plays come out rather less regularly than critics would have us believe. The mechanical production of one play a year or per theatrical season is happily not true, to judge from available evidence. Even a scrupulously prudent scholar like Lancaster can state, or imply, this criticism, for example when dealing with the dates of Dom Bertrand and L'Amour à la mode. While, in the absence of autobiographical material or even of an adequate correspondence, it is well nigh impossible to determine when all of Thomas' plays were written, it is clear, for example, that a period of twelve to fifteen months saw the first performances of Le Geôlier, Le Charme and Timocrate in 1655-6. A similar bunching occurs with Le Galand doublé, Stilicon and Camma (all major plays) between January 1660 and January 1661.

190. Mercure galant, January 1710, p. 296.

Later, at the Guénégaud, there were three first performances of Thomas Corneille plays in eleven months: Dom César in December 1674, Circé in March 1675 and L'Inconnu in November of the same year. We saw earlier how L'Inconnu was a self-confessed attempt by Th. Corneille and de Visé to cash in on the huge success of Circé.

A further argument advanced by those who have studied Thomas Corneille's rhythm of production is that he wrote quickly, the implication being that fast means badly. When Lancaster discovers two plays which appear to have come out in rapid succession, as in the case of Les Engagements and Le Feint astrologue, he concludes¹⁹¹ that this must be so "in view of the fact that Thomas wrote so much that he must have composed rapidly". If the one-play-per-year theory is far from accurate, we need not necessarily assume that many of his works were hurriedly written. Elsewhere, I have discussed this point in relation to Le Galand doublé and Stilicon¹⁹², and the gaps in Thomas' performance schedule (e.g. between Le Berger extravagant and Les Illustres ennemis, between Pyrrhus and Antiochus and so on) leave room for more thorough writing or preparation than certain of his detractors would allow. By this, I do not mean, of course, that all the plays are skilfully composed. One cannot deny that he did write a

191. History, vol. II, p. 749.

192. "Composition et représentation chez Thomas Corneille", Studi francesi, 36 (1968), pp. 471-476.

lot; but the hoary old myth propagated by Fusée de Voisenon of the trap-door, which Pierre opened when he needed a rhyme from his younger brother, is more a comment on Pierre's failing or uncertain powers than a criticism of Thomas' apparent ease of writing. For the trap-door, if it ever existed, must date from the post-1662 Paris period, as prior to this, in Rouen, the brothers lived in contiguous but separate houses, while the nearby maison de campagne at Petit-Couronne, still happily preserved, contained a communal first-floor study ... and no trappe.

This brings me to a third main point - the obvious success of much of Thomas' work. It is this fact, more than any other, perhaps, which justifies a re-appraisal of his theatre. For cutting remarks by seventeenth-century and later critics to the effect that his was a passing fortune, that he wrote for his contemporaries and not for posterity, belie the high quality of certain (but definitely not of all) of our author's plays. One cannot really hold him responsible for the partiality and shortsightedness of later generations, whose view of seventeenth-century literature is only now, and happily, being corrected. If Thomas did write largely for his own time (and this is indisputable), must he be criticised for it?

The legendary success of Timocrate tends to obscure the reception given to other plays of various kinds. Circé in 1675 had virtually the same run as Timocrate had had, while Camma, back in 1661, was so popular that extra Thursday performances were added to the normal thrice-weekly ones.

La Devineresse (1679) catches in on public interest in l'affaire des poisons and deals with la Voisin at the time of her trial and execution. The play has forty-seven consecutive performances. Ariane a few years earlier, in 1672, rivals Bajazet, which is performed in Paris at the same time; de Visé, in the Mercure¹⁹³, writes that "pour tout dire enfin, les charmes de Bajazet n'ont pas empêché leurs Admirateurs d'en trouver dans cette piece (Ariane), & d'y retourner plus d'une fois". We have noticed, too, how many of the now lesser known comedies and tragedies were, to judge from contemporary accounts, well received, and how they enjoyed what were, for the seventeenth century, long initial runs and successful revivals. Indeed, the favour with which La Mort de Commode was greeted, so soon after the overwhelming reception given to Timocrate, may well have encouraged Pierre to accept the challenge offered by Oedipe and return to the theatre. Was Thomas' success solely based on a pandering to current tastes? For if it was, he must have had his ear close to the ground for a remarkably long time ...

Like Pierre, he started with a series of comedies, which, we can fairly suppose, were performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne; his brother had patronised the Marais with his comedies of the 1630s. Between 1655 and 1659, he dealt with the Marais, as far as we can judge, and had performed there three comedies (and also perhaps a fourth, Le Galand

193. Mercure galant, 5 March 1672, p. 57

doublé), together with tragedies of a largely romanesque nature, such as Timocrate and, probably, Bérénice. In 1660, he left the Marais and moved to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, whose troupe was to perform most of his major tragedies, from Stilicon and Camma to Laodice, Annibal and Ariane. After Théodat in 1672, Thomas gave the remainder of his plays, apart from the pièces lyriques, to the Guénégaud, i.e. the theatre with elements of the Marais and Molière's troupe, and then, after 1680, to the Comédie-Française, which included the Hôtel de Bourgogne players. The only exception to this pattern is the successful presentation of Le Comte d'Essex at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in January 1678. Is it pure chance that this fine play should have been performed by what was, or had been, the best of the seventeenth-century Paris companies, rather than by the Guénégaud? On hearing of the merit of Thomas' play, the Guénégaud, we are told, was forced to retaliate: "Elle (Thomas Cornéille's tragedy) a fait du moins assez de bruit par quelques Lectures, pour obliger l'autre Troupe à promettre aussi un Comte d'Essex (Boyer's Comte d'Essex) qu'elle luy doit opposer"¹⁹⁴.

Public performance, and successful performance at that, seems to have been necessary to Thomas Cornéille, to judge by the way he changes theatres or moves from comedy to tragedy and so on. His choice of the Hôtel de Bourgogne for his early comedies was probably dictated by Pierre,

194. Mercure galant, 31 December 1677, p. 164.

who gave his own plays to that theatre between 1647 and 1659; we have noticed how the privilège for the earliest of Thomas' plays were taken out in his brother's name. The switch from the Hôtel de Bourgogne to the Marais coincides with Pierre's withdrawal from the theatre after the failure of Pertharite; during the 7-year silence, Thomas appears to patronise the Marais exclusively¹⁹⁵. Well he might, for

195. It should be pointed out that Pierre, having finished his Imitation, starts on Le Toison d'Or, for the curious Marquis de Sourdeac, in the spring or summer of 1656 (G. Couton, La vieillesse de Corneille, p.25). Thomas' letter of 1 December 1659 to de Pure points out that "Mr de Sourdeac fait tousiours trauailler a la machine, et j'espere qu'elle paroistra a Paris sur la fin de Januier. J'y seray auparauant pour Stilicon .." (MS. B.N. f.fr. 12763, f^o 172). In fact, the spectacle is first put on by the Marais company at Sourdeac's château de Neuborg only in November 1660, five months after Louis XIV's wedding, for which the tragedy in its final form, with prologue, was supposedly written: "L'heureux mariage de Sa Majesté, et la paix qu'il lui a plu de donner à ses peuples, ayant été les motifs de la réjouissance publique pour laquelle cette tragédie a été préparée, non-seulement il étoit juste qu'ils servissent de sujet au prologue qui la précède, mais il étoit même absolument impossible d'en choisir une plus illustre matière." (Décoration du prologue of La Toison d'Or, M.-L., vol. VI, pp. 253-254. Cf. what Corneille says about the place of the prologue in Andromède and La Toison d'Or: "Notre siècle a inventé une autre espèce de prologue pour les pièces de machines, qui ne touche point au sujet, et n'est qu'une louange adroite du prince devant qui ces poèmes doivent être représentés". Discours du poème dramatique, M.-L., vol. I, pp. 46-47.) Only in February 1661 is the play mounted at the théâtre du Marais itself.

Also in 1656, in the preface to the complete Imitation, published in March, Corneille announces a revision of his plays and what will become the Examens. The more substantial Discours are not mentioned until August 1660, when he writes to de Pure. The three volumes of the 1660 edition of Corneille, containing the plays and all the prefatory matter just mentioned, appear two months later, at the end of October.

Timocrate is a huge success there. But after La Mort de Commode, Bérénice (as involved as Timocrate) and Darius, a simpler play, are relative failures, and this lack of continuing triumph may well have occasioned Thomas Corneille's return to the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1660. We have seen, too, how his own opinion of the Marais was not high at the time, how the cost of his plays was becoming a burden on the actors - and these facts, together with the successful performance of Pierre's Oedipe at the Hôtel in January 1659, serve to explain his change of allegiance. According to de Visé in the Mercure galant fifty years after the event, Thomas' decision was aided by a request from the company itself: "Les comédiens de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne, chagrins des avantages que recevoient les Comédiens du Marais, mirent tout en usage pour s'acquérir M. Corneille de l'Isle, il se trouve obligé de travailler pour eux, parce qu'ils avoient fait entrer dans leur Troupe quelques Comédiens du Marais, sans lesquels ses Pièces auroient été mal jouées. Il fit donc représenter Stilicon sur le Théâtre de Bourgogne. Je ne vous dis rien de cette Pièce; personne n'ignore qu'elle fut le charme de tout Paris"¹⁹⁶.

In 1672, the tragedy Théodat failed, partly because of its poor quality, partly, as we have noted, because of a cabale. So far, it has not been possible to determine exactly what the cabale was that arose over this play or

196. Eloge de Thomas Corneille, Mercure galant, January 1710, pp. 277-278.

over the Comte d'Essex, which succeeded just over five years later, despite criticism (see above). At any event, Thomas' next play, a comedy, is given to the Guénégaud, as are the subsequent plays until 1678, with the exception of the tragedy La Mort d'Achille, which had only a relative success. Clearly, the Hôtel was the theatre for tragedy, while the Guénégaud troupe, as might be expected, were better at comedy and could cope with spectacles like Circé, L'Inconnu, and so on.

All in all, Thomas is seen to be fairly astute. On the whole, he gives his plays (or has them given) to the best available actors, those who are either most suited to the type of play or who currently have the finest reputation. It has been said that Thomas moves from the Hôtel to the Guénégaud because of the reputation of Racine at the former theatre; but Racine was successful there several years before 1673, even if Mithridate's success in January 1673 comes hard on the heels of the failure of Théodat in the previous November. Donneau de Visé, with whom Thomas is about to collaborate, is a passionate enemy of Racine, and his criticism of Mithridate in the new Mercure galant is mildly ironical in tone, at best grudgingly favourable. One must assume that Thomas' view of his rival is, or will be, coloured by de Visé's opinions.

When a particular performance fails, Thomas soon switches either company or form. The Au Lecteur to L'Amour à la mode, published in the spring of 1653, opens thus:

"Voicy vne Comedie d'un caracteres si different de la dernière de ma façon qui l'a précédée sur le Theatre, que quoy qu'elles soient toutes deux du mesme genre, il n'y a guere plus de disproportion du Tragique au Comique, que des extravagances ridicules de D. Bertran, à l'enlouement galand d'Oronte qui fait tout en celle-cy." Such terms are almost the echo of what his brother wrote nine years earlier, in the Epître to Le Menteur: "Je vous présente une pièce de théâtre d'un style si éloigné de ma dernière, qu'on aura de la peine à croire qu'elles soient parties toutes deux de la même main, dans le même hiver"¹⁹⁷. The admitted failure of Le Charme de la voix, after a series of comedies also based on Spanish originals, is followed by a quite different kind of play, the tragedy/tragi-comedy Timocrate; this, rather than Pierre's absence from the theatre at the time, is no doubt the explanation for Thomas' move into tragedy, for otherwise why would he wait almost five years after the collapse of Pertharite before attempting to rival his brother? It would be unfair to suggest, I think, that Pierre was so occupied in 1656 with the publication of the complete Imitation de Jésus-Christ or with preparations for La Toison d'Or, underway in July 1656¹⁹⁸, that he had no time to give his younger brother much help with his comedy ... Timocrate succeeds, and Donneau de Visé maintains that Thomas' initia-

197. M.-L., vol. IV, p. 130.

198. G. Couton, La vieillesse de Corneille, p. 25.

tive encouraged other dramatists to write plays in similar vein¹⁹⁹.

To his astuteness, Thomas adds a becoming modesty and circumspection. The early prefaces, in particular, prove that it is either reluctantly, or else only after considerable thought, that he is releasing his works to the printer - unless such statements are, of course, mere bluff. Care seems to have been taken in several instances to organise informal readings, often long before first performance. Admittedly, as the abbé d'Aubignac points out in his Projet pour le rétablissement du théâtre français, written circa 1640 and published in the Pratique in 1657, this is not an infallible procedure: "Car souvent il arrive que les moins agréables à lire, sont les plus parfaites en la representation: et qu'au contraire, celles que l'on trouve merveilleuses sur le papier, se trouvent quelquefois tres-defectueuses sur le Theatre ... Les choses belles à dire, ne le sont pas toujours à faire, la douceur de la lecture rend certaines choses agreables, en fait passer d'autres pour molles et foibles; au lieu que la vehemence du Récit change les agreables en indecentes, et fortifie les foibles ..."²⁰⁰. But the encouragement which Thomas Corneille received then or at other times is duly acknowledged in the prefaces to Les Engagements du hasard, Le

199. Mercure galant, January 1710, pp. 274-275.

200. La Pratique du théâtre, ed. P. Martino, Algiers, 1927, p. 392.

Berger extravagant, Les Illustres ennemis, Timocrate,
Bérénice, Darius and so on.

Chapter 2

Tragedy and Tragi-Comedy: the Question of Timocrate (1656)

Tragedy and tragi-comedy : the question of Timocrate.

Perhaps it is significant that, with the exception of Antiochus, which he had performed as late as January 1666, Thomas Corneille wrote no play to which he gave the title tragi-comedy. And this despite the fact that he was composing plays of various types and in quite large quantities throughout the 1650s and early 1660s. Equally noticeable is the fact that, although Antiochus is called a tragi-comedy on the title-page, the Au Lecteur to the first edition starts: "Il n'y a rien de plus connu que le sujet de cette Tragedie", while the remainder of this piece of prefatory matter is largely devoted to an explanation of changes made to the historical account, principally for reasons of bienséances.

Yet the 1650s, although witnessing a decline in the tragi-comedy's popularity, still saw many produced. Even at the end of the decade there was Chappuzeau's Armetzar, Morel's Timoclée, Gilbert's Chresphonte and Quinault's Amalasonte, all performed in 1657, while in 1658 Scarron brought out his Prince corsaire and Quinault two more tragi-comedies: Le Feint Alcibiade and Le Mariage de Cambise. The following two or three years saw, among the best known, Boyer's Fédéric and Policrite performed, as well as Quinault's Stratonice and Agrippa, and Gilbert's Le Courtisan parfait and Les Amours d'Angélique et de Médor.

It is surprising, to say the least, that Thomas Corneille

did not take advantage of what was, it would seem, a form still favoured by French audiences. Or did he? Was his use of the term tragedy in the late 50s and early 60s wide enough to incorporate features more usually described as tragi-comic? What, indeed, was seventeenth-century practice in this respect, and how far was Thomas merely ignoring a distinction that now perhaps existed in name only?

Definitions of what constitutes a tragi-comedy can be traced back to the early part of the seventeenth century in France; but the term could be first attributed to Plautus, who, in the prologue to his Amphitruo, has Mercury, disguised as Sosia, say:

quid contraxistis frontem? quia tragoediam
dixi futuram hanc? deus sum, commutavero.
eandem hanc, si voltis, faciam iam ex tragoedia
comoedia ut sit omnibus isdem versibus.
utrum fit an non? voltis? sed ego stultior,
quasi nesciam vos velle, qui divos siem.
teneo quid animi vestri super hac re siet:
faciam ut commixta sit tragicocomoedia.
nam me perpetuo facere ut sit comoedia,
reges quo veniant et di, non par arbitror.
quidigitur? quoniam hic servos quoque partes¹ habet,
faciam sit, proinde ut dixi, tragicocomoedia.

However, as the abbé d'Aubignac will point out in his Pratique du théâtre, published in 1657, "c'est une raillerie qu'il (Plaute) fait dans son Prologue, en joignant les noms de ces deux Poèmes, comme il en avoit mêlé les Personnages... Aussi Plaute n'a-t-il jamais nommé son Amphitryon une Tragi-Comédie ... mais ... il la nomme hardiment Comédie en plusieurs endroits de son Prologue". Plautus's meaning of the

1. Plautus, Amphitruo, ed. A. Palmer, London, 1906, pp. 8-9.

word, says d'Aubignac, was "une veritable Comédie, dans laquelle les personnes illustres estoient introduites pour bouffonner et rendre leur propre grandeur ridicule"².

Garnier's Bradamante of 1582 is really the first French tragi-comedy (or "tragedie comédie"), although there had been attempts to play with this combination earlier in the sixteenth century, under the guise of morality and mystery plays. Theorists like Scaliger and Castelvetro, and later Mairret and Chapelain, will restrict tragedy to plays with an unhappy dénouement, and thus leave a clear category for tragi-comedy. Very early in the seventeenth century, in his Art poétique, Vauquelin de la Fresnaye gives a definition:

On fait la comédie aussi double, de sorte
 Qu'avecque le tragic le comic se rapporte.
 Quand il y a du meurtre, et qu'on voit toutefois
 Qu'à la fin sont contents les plus grands et les rois,
 Quand du grave et du bas le parler on mendie,
 On abuse du nom de trage-comédie;
 Car on peut bien encor par un succès heureux,
 Finir la tragédie en ébats amoureux:
 Tels étaient d'Euripide et l'Ion et l'Oreste,
 L'Iphigénie, Hélène et la fidèle Alceste.
 Tasse, par son Aminte au bois, fait voir d'ailleurs,
 Que ces contes tragics ainsi sont les meilleurs.
 (chant II)

In 1628, in the preface to Jean de Schelandre's tragi-comedy Tyr et Sidon (which started out twenty years earlier as a tragedy and was remodelled under Hardy's influence), François Ogier discusses the limitations of tragedy as conceived by Antiquity. Tragedy had a religious bias, and hence a need for attention to bienséances; many, too, were written

2. D'Aubignac, La Pratique du théâtre, ed. P. Martino. Algiers, 1927, pp. 151 and 153.

for competitions, and perhaps as a result tended to be conservative in form, employing messengers: "Le second inconvenient qu'ont encouru les poètes anciens pour vouloir resserrer les accidents d'une tragedie entre deux soleils est d'estre contraints d'introduire à chaque bout de champ des messagers..." And he continues: "Il est bien plus raisonnable de mesler les choses graves avec les moins serieuses en une mesme suite de discours, et les faire rencontrer en un mesme subject de fable ou d'histoire, que de joindre hors d'oeuvre des satyres avec des tragedies, qui n'ont aucune connexité ensemble et qui confondent et troublent la veüe et la memoire des auditeurs: car de dire qu'il est mal seant de faire paroistre en une mesme pièce les mesmes personnes, traitant tantost d'affaires serieuses, importantes et tragiques, et incontinent après de choses communes, vaines et comiques, c'est ignorer la condition de la vie des hommes, de qui les jours et les heures sont bien souvent entrecoupés de ris et de larmes, de contentement et d'affliction, selon qu'ils sont agitez de la bonne ou de la mauvaise fortune"³.

Three years later, in the preface to his Silvanire, Mairret states that tragi-comedy is a mixture of tragedy and comedy, both of which he defines in fairly standard terms⁴. The main interest of Mairret's theory, which Scherer

3. J. de Schelandre, Tyr et Sidon, Préface au Lecteur par F.O.P. (François Ogier, Parisien) in Ancien théâtre françois, ed. E.L.N. Viollet-le-Duc, Paris, 1856, vol. VIII, pp. 12, 20.

4. J. Mairret, Silvanire, ed. R. Otto, Bamberg, 1890, p.14.

describes as "une préface sensationnelle, dont le retentissement en son temps peut être aujourd'hui comparé à celui qu'a eu la préface de Cromwell de Victor Hugo"⁵, lies in his definitions of the unities, his insistence on unity of plot and in the consequently fuller psychological study of the characters. In the early thirties, tragi-comedy is flourishing: the Mémoire de Mahelot⁶ shows twenty-nine tragi-comedies at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1633, along with only two tragedies, two tragédies pastorales, eight pastorals and a similar number of comedies. Du Ryer and Scudéry are indulging in the fashion, as is P. Corneille himself. Clitandre, a tragi-comedy from 1632 to 1644, is then re-christened a tragedy; Le Cid, five years after Clitandre's appearance, goes through the same process; even L'Illusion comique, performed in 1636, is called a comedy, but is in many ways a tragi-comedy or, as Corneille himself describes it, in the dédicace, "un étrange monstre". Lancaster indicates that more tragi-comedies were acted at the Hôtel de Bourgogne from 1633 to 1636 than plays of all other types put together⁷.

Soon after Le Cid, Desmarets provides a definition of tragi-comedy in the Aux lecteurs to his Scipion, published in 1639. Despite the happy ending to the play, he had been tempted to call it a tragedy, on the accepted basis that

5. J. Scherer, La dramaturgie classique en France, Paris, 1950, p. 186.

6. La Mémoire de Mahelot, ed. H.C. Lancaster, Paris, 1920, pp. 65-107.

7. H.C. Lancaster, The French tragi-comedy, Baltimore, 1907, p. 149.

tragedy was concerned with "des Roys, des Princes & ... autres personnes illustres", while comedy dealt with "des personnages pris d'entre le peuple" and "des sujets bas, & des accidens ridicules, avec des propos ordinaires & capables d'exciter le rire par leur naïveté". But he has given in to current usage and decided to call it a tragi-comedy, that is, "vne piece dont les principaux personnages sont Princes, & les accidens graues & funestes, mais dont la fin est heureuse, encore qu'il n'y ait rien de Comique qui y soit meslé."

In Desmarets' mind, then, the tragi-comedy is a tragedy in all but the dénouement, which is "happy" in the sense that death is avoided; otherwise the characters are noble and the subject-matter that which he describes as eminently tragic, "des sujets graues, avec des discours serieux & digne des personnes de ce rang". La Mesnardière, too, in his Poétique, insists on the happy dénouement of tragi-comedy, "vne Auanture de Théâtre où les malheurs sont effacez par quelque bon éuénement"⁸. In the Epître (1650) in front of Don Sanche, Corneille will posit a tragedy without elevated characters⁹, while both in his theoretical writings and in his practice he will, from as early as Cinna, admit of a tragedy without bloodshed, offering

8. Cit. H.R. Reese, La Mesnardière's "Poétique" (1639), Baltimore, 1937, p. 62.

9. P. Corneille, Writings on the theatre, ed. H.T. Barnwell, Oxford, 1965, pp. 196-197 and note 58.

the characters not just a dead-end but an acceptable way out of their potentially mortal dilemma.

At the same time as Corneille is writing his tragédies heureuses, the abbé d'Aubignac is, we must suppose, drafting the Pratique du théâtre which, although it only appears in 1657, is commonly accepted as having been largely written in the early 1640s. For d'Aubignac, too, tragedy need not have an unhappy ending: "ce terme ne veut rien dire sinon Une chose magnifique, sérieuse, grave et convenable aux agitations et aux grands revers de la fortune des Princes; et qu'une Pièce de Theatre porte ce nom de Tragédie seulement en consideration des Incidens et des personnes dont elle represente la vie, et non pas à raison de la Catastrophe."

D'Aubignac criticises the use of the word tragi-comedy, "ce nouveau terme qui semble ... peu à peu s'estre introduit pour signifier quelque nouvelle espece de Poème Dramatique", for it seems to him to be superfluous: in so-called tragi-comedies, "il n'y a rien qui ressente la Comédie: Tout y est grave et merveilleux, rien de populaire ny de bouffon"¹⁰. Tragedy, with its variety of possible dénouements, is a more interesting category, for tragi-comedy, like comedy, reveals all too soon what it is about: "...j'ajoute que ce nom seul (tragi-comédie) peut détruire toute (sic) les beautez d'un Poeme, qui consistent en la Peripétie ... Dès lors qu'on a dit Tragi-Comédie, on

10. Ed. cit., pp. 143, 142 and 148.

découvre quelle en sera la Catastrophe." The audience's identification with the characters and the "willing suspension of disbelief" are thus adversely affected. Like Desmarets, he defines tragi-comedy as "un Poëme Dramatique dont tout le Sujet est heroïque, et la fin heureuse, la plus noble et la plus agreable espee de Tragédie, fort commune parmy les Anciens", and concludes prophetically that the future may well see the dropping of the word tragi-comedy and a return to tragedy, "conservant ce nom indifferemment aux Poëmes Dramatiques dont les personnes sont heroïques, sans distinguer si les catastrophes sont heureuses ou funestes, afin d'empêcher que d'abord les Spectateurs ne découvrent l'événement de leurs Intrigues"¹¹.

Desmarets' and d'Aubignac's definition of the tragi-comedy as a potentially tragic subject, dealing with socially elevated characters but having, in the event, a happy ending, is still that put forward by Samuel Chappuzeau in his study Le Théâtre françois, published in 1674. "La Tragedie est vne representation graue & serieuse d'une action funeste", says Chappuzeau, "qui s'est passée entre des personnes que leur grande qualité, ou leur grand merite releuent au dessus des personnes communes, & le plus souuent c'est entre des Princes & des Rois." Tragi-comedy is different in only one respect: "La Tragi-Comedie nous met deuant les yeux de nobles auantures entre d'Illustres personnes,

11. Ibid., pp. 148, 153 and 157.

menacées de quelque grande infortune, qui se trouue suiuite d'un heureux euenement". And soon afterwards Richelet, in his Dictionnaire françois of 1680, sums up this feeling: tragi-comedy, "c'est une tragedie dont la fin est heureuse. On croit que le Poete Garnier a introduit le premier dans notre langue le mot de tragi-comedie mais inutilement, parce que tragedie & tragi-comedie est la meme chose, & la tragedie qui finit par la mort n'est pas plus tragedie que celle qui finit par la joie. En efét de dix-neuf tragedies qui nous restent d'Euripide, la plûpart finissent heureusement"¹².

It would appear, then, that while Jean de Schelandre and Mairet, in the prefaces by them which I have quoted, regard tragi-comedy as in some way a mixture of tragedy and comedy - and consequently a more realistic form of drama than pure tragedy - , neither states explicitly that it should have a happy ending; this is at best assumed. But almost simultaneously, or at most ten years later, Pierre Corneille is writing tragedies which are clearly tragic, whatever the Frenchman of the 1640s understood by the term¹³, and have a happy dénouement. Later definitions of tragi-comedy, such as Chappuzeau's, where the "heureux

12. S. Chappuzeau, Le Théâtre françois, ed. G. Monval, Paris, 1876, p. 25; P. Richelet, Dictionnaire de la langue française, ancienne et moderne, Paris, J. Estienne, 1728, vol. III, p. 736. The dictionary was originally published by Widerhold in Geneva in 1680 under the title Dictionnaire françois.

13. Cf. H.T. Barnwell, The tragic in French tragedy, Belfast, 1966; L. Wang, "The 'tragic' theater of Corneille", French Review, XXV (1952), pp. 182-191.

euenement" is opposed to the "representation graue & serieuse d'une action funeste" of tragedy, seem forced in the distinctions they raise, as if at least one element must be found by which to differentiate the two categories. As far as theory goes, little clear difference is apparent either in the rank of the characters or in the dangers they face. And if all extant French tragi-comedies, both romanesque and otherwise, have happy endings, by no means all seventeenth-century plays which are not comedies but have happy endings are tragi-comedies. Both Desmarets and d'Aubignac, for example, separated by almost twenty years of dramatic production, refuse to see as necessary the introduction into tragi-comedy of comic elements, whereas those writing just previous to this - Schelandre and Mairet, for example - had done so.

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Having seen what, in their theoretical writings at least, some of the main French dramatists of the first half of the 17th century thought of tragi-comedy, let us look now at some definitions of tragedy with which to compare the points raised so far. What are the basic ingredients of tragedy in a seventeenth-century author's opinion? What structural and other distinctions can be made between a tragedy and a tragi-comedy?

Remarks on - or even merely assumptions about - the nature and form of tragedy occur later in the century than those on tragi-comedy, and naturally enough, as it is not

until the advent of Le Cid in 1637 that much interest is aroused by what is, or is not, appropriate. Scudéry, in his Observations sur le Cid of that year, points to the inevitability of a tragedy and the absence of any opportunity to catch the reader or spectator unawares: it is a genre, he says, in which "on n'a pas besoin de surprendre le spectateur, puisqu'il sait déjà ce qu'on doit représenter"¹⁴. Pierre Corneille, the author aimed at in Scudéry's Observations, would not have agreed, for although the end-result or effet of his tragedies may be foreseen - his attention to historical vérité, even if this is at times invraisemblable, occasions this - , the means to that end, the acheminements and péripéties which keep the action moving through the five acts, can be invented and therefore come as a surprise to the spectator. Corneille's dramatic practice leads one to assume that he sought to gain as much capital as possible out of his choice of largely unknown subjects, and that, in part at least, his aim was to "surprendre le spectateur". Of course, he was not alone in this in seventeenth-century France.

In his critical writings, apart from advocating the necessity of vérité as a basis of good tragedy, Corneille also, at one point, suggests that tragedy can exist without elevated characters, provided that the action is of a sufficient quality. The Epître of 1650 in front of Don

14. M.-L., vol. XII, p. 443.

Sanche is an important document, as Corneille here makes clear his understanding of the terms tragedy, comedy and comédie héroïque. Don Sanche itself is a comédie héroïque, he says, that is "une véritable comédie, quoique tous les acteurs soient ou rois ou grands d'Espagne, puisqu'on n'y voit naître aucun péril par qui nous puissions être portés à la pitié ou à la crainte", to which is added the word héroïque, "pour satisfaire aucunement à la dignité de ces personnages, qui pourrait sembler profanée par la bassesse d'un titre que jamais on n'a appliqué si haut"¹⁵.

Tragedy is different, but not in that it necessarily deals with well-known figures. "J'ose m'imaginer que ceux qui ont restreint cette sorte de poème (tragédie) aux personnes illustres n'en ont décidé que sur l'opinion qu'ils ont eue qu'il n'y avait que la fortune des rois et des princes qui fût capable d'une action telle que ce grand maître de l'art (Aristote) nous prescrit. Cependant, quand il examine lui-même les qualités nécessaires au héros de la tragédie, il ne touche point du tout à sa naissance, et ne s'attache qu'aux incidents de sa vie et à ses mœurs. Il demande un homme qui ne soit ni tout méchant ni tout bon; il le demande persécuté par quelqu'un de ses plus proches; il demande qu'il tombe en danger de mourir par une main obligée à le conserver; et je ne vois point pourquoi cela ne puisse arriver qu'à un prince, et que dans un moindre

15. Writings on the theatre, pp. 197-198.

rang on soit à couvert de ces malheurs"¹⁶.

The hero's rank is thus of secondary importance; his conduct is what counts, and hence Corneille's acute observation, in the same Epître to Constantin Huyghens, that the characters are less important than the action in a play. This is the basis for Corneille's attack on the word tragicomédie and on Plautus, the "bonhomme Plaute". "Parce qu'il y a des dieux et des rois dans son Amphitryon," says Corneille, "il veut que c'en soit une (tragédie), et parce qu'il y a des valets qui bouffonnent, il veut que ce soit aussi une comédie, et lui donne l'un et l'autre nom, par un composé qu'il forme exprès, de peur de ne lui donner pas tout ce qu'il croit lui appartenir"¹⁷.

Yet the question of conduct tends to be overshadowed in the seventeenth century by insistence on rank. In 1657, d'Aubignac denies that tragedy must necessarily have deaths as an ending and defines at least ancient tragedy as "une chose magnifique, sérieuse, grave et convenable aux agitations et aux grands revers de la fortune des Princes". A play is tragic "seulement en consideration des Incidens et des personnes dont elle represente la vie, et non pas à raison de la Catastrophe"¹⁸. This is why, in D'Aubignac's eyes, the term tragi-comedy is unnecessary: "ce que nous auons fait sans fondement, est que nous avons osté le nom

16. Ibid., pp. 195-196.

17. Ibid., p. 195.

18. La Pratique du théâtre, p. 143.

de Tragédie aux Pièces de Theatre dont la Catastrophe est heureuse, encore que le Sujet et les personnes soient Tragiques, c'est à dire heroiques, pour leur donner celui de Tragi-Comédies"¹⁹. Corneille agrees, too, along with Aristotle, that tragic action can move from good to bad and also from bad to good²⁰.

As the tragi-comedy died a natural death in the late 50s and early 60s, attention turned to tragedy, and critics commented both on tastes in tragedy and on what seemed to them to be necessary ingredients. In the Epistre in front of his tragedy Oropaste ou le faux Tonaxare, performed in the winter of 1662, Boyer writes: "La Fortune s'est enfin déclarée pour luy (le faux Tonaxare), apres auoir esté balancée par le malheur du Siècle, qui tombe insensiblement dans le dégoust des Pièces sérieuses". The public is still unaccustomed to serious works. By the time Racine has brought out the majority of his plays, the view has altered; and Chappuzeau can write in 1674, in his Théâtre françois: "Le goust change, & l'emporte souuent sur la raison. On veut de l'amour, & en quantité, & de toutes les manieres; il faut le traiter à fond, & dans la Comedie on demande aujourd'huy beaucoup de bagatelles, & peu de solide. Pour ce qui est de la Tragedie, ... la Sophonisbe qui a de la tendresse pour Massinisse iusqu'à la mort, a

19. Ibid., pp. 147-148.

20. Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique, in Writings on the theatre, pp. 13-14.

esté plus goûtée que celle qui sacrifie cette tendresse à la gloire de sa Patrie, quoy que le fameux Autheur du dernier de ces deux ouvrages l'ayt traité avec toute la science qui luy est particuliere, & qui luy a si bien appris à faire parler & les Carthaginois, & les Grecs, & les Romains comme ils deuoient parler, & mieux qu'ils ne parloient en effet"²¹.

Corneille's tragedy Sophonisbe in 1663 is thus less popular than Mairet's of thirty years earlier, and a major consideration is the relative importance of the love-element in attracting the audience's interest. The following year, 1675, Villiers provides, in his Entretiens sur les tragédies de ce temps, a discussion in which Cléarque defends love in plays against Timante who, favouring its abolition, points out (pp. 71-77) that over the previous thirty years some of the best plays, such as Pompée, Rodogune or Andromaque, depend essentially on vengeance, ambition, politics or some similar, powerful force, not on love.

Also in that same year, Phérotée de Lacroix brought out the first edition of his Art de la poesie françoise, a greatly expanded version of which was published in 1694. His early definition of tragi-comedy ("une representation un peu moins serieuse, que la Tragedie; elle nous represente les nobles aventures de quelques Illustres Personnes menacées

21. Ed. cit., pp. 41-42. Cf. Nicomède, Au Lecteur and Examen.

d'une grande infortune qui se trouve suivie d'un heureux evenement" is added to and refined later, when he notes: "L'une (tragédie) a un sujet plus triste & plus serieux; & l'autre (tragi-comédie) est un mélange d'affliction & de joie, & represente ainsi mieux l'état inconstant de la plupart des gens"²². Equally, tragedy is redefined: "une representation serieuse de quelque Action funeste, qui s'est passée entre des Personnes de qualité, ou d'un grand merite, comme entre des Roys, des Princes, de grands Seigneurs & autres Gens, que la naissance, la fortune, ou le merite élevent au dessus des Personnes communes" becomes, in 1694, "une representation serieuse de quelque action funeste, qui s'est passée entre des personnes de qualité & d'un grand merite; ce qui excite la terreur ou la pitié, ou toutes les deux ensemble, & instruit avec plaisir les spectateurs ..."²³.

Pity and fear: Aristotle's terms have by this time become the mainspring of Racinian drama, and the romanesque, tenderly expressed works of Quinault and his contemporaries ten, fifteen or twenty years earlier - tragedies and especially tragi-comedies - have already been superseded. For La Bruyère, in his Caractères, tragedy "n'est donc pas un tissu de jolis sentiments, de déclarations tendres, d'entretiens galants, de portraits agréables, de mots doucereux, ou

22. Lyon, 1675, p. 59; Lyon, 1694, p. 176.

23. Lyon, 1675, p. 59; Lyon, 1694, p. 173.

quelquefois assez plaisants pour faire rire, suivi à la vérité d'une dernière scène où les mutins n'entendent aucune raison, et où, pour la bienséance, il y a enfin du sang répandu, et quelque malheureux à qui il en coûte la vie". Now, at the very close of Racine's dramatic career, "le poème tragique vous serre le coeur dès son commencement, vous laisse à peine dans tout son progrès la liberté de respirer et le temps de vous remettre, ou s'il vous donne quelque relâche, c'est pour vous replonger dans de nouveaux abîmes et dans de nouvelles alarmes. Il vous conduit à la terreur par la pitié, ou réciproquement à la pitié par le terrible, vous mène par les larmes, par les sanglots, par l'incertitude, par l'espérance, par la crainte, par les surprises et par l'horreur jusqu'à la catastrophe"²⁴.

Now, La Bruyère's sympathies lay with Racine rather than Corneille, although these remarks on tragedy appeared some two years before the attack on La Bruyère by Thomas Corneille and Fontenelle in the June 1693 Mercure galant and La Bruyère's condemnation of these two writers in his Discours de réception à l'Académie Française of the same month. Quite apart from the well-known distinction he makes between the idealisation of Corneille's characters and the realism of Racine's, La Bruyère finds the earlier dramatist "inégal", even though he praises his poetry, his dramatic technique, his dénouements and his essential variety. But La Bruyère's correspondingly favourable view

24. Des ouvrages de l'esprit, LI (1691), in Caractères, ed. R. Garapon, Paris, 1962, p. 86.

of Racine, in the same passage of the Caractères, as a refined, penetrating and regular dramatist is not biased; the later remarks on tragedy quoted above are fore-shadowed in an important comparison between Corneille and Racine: "L'un élève, étonne, maîtrise, instruit; l'autre plaît, remue, touche, pénètre"²⁵.

Already this late insistence on the creating of emotion is taking us beyond the limits of our field of study in Thomas Corneille, although it is necessary to make the point, as Thomas may well have been a precursor of Racine and his contemporaries in this respect, and such a new interest or aim would be bound to colour, if not mould, Thomas' dramatic practice. What conclusions can we now draw on the distinctions made in the seventeenth century between tragedy and tragi-comedy, at least as far as theorists or dramatists in their critical or prefatory matter go?

Differences between the two forms are largely blurred; features of one or other are frequently regarded as optional, and many are common to both categories. For some, such as d'Aubignac or Chappuzeau, tragedy deals with noble characters, although Chappuzeau and his contemporary Phérotée de Lacroix also consider as suitable characters of relatively low rank but of genuine merit. Corneille, for his part, while normally taking characters of elevated status, does suggest that this is not necessarily so, although the

25. Des ouvrages de l'esprit, LIV (1688); ibid., pp. 87 and 88 (my italics).

suggestion comes in the context of his comédie héroïque Don Sanche. The rank of characters in tragi-comedy is also a noble one, according to, for example, Desmarets in 1638 and d'Aubignac in the Pratique du théâtre of 1657.

Theorists and commentators insist on the "seriousness" of the action in both tragedy and tragi-comedy: among them, Desmarets and d'Aubignac. The *dénouement* or "catastrophe" in tragedy can be, and often is, unhappy, but both Corneille and later Racine, as well as, for example, the abbé d'Aubignac, are at pains to point out that bloodshed is not necessary - a notion which is put into practice from the earliest days of "regular tragedy". Or tragedy, according to Corneille and d'Aubignac, can have a "happy" ending, i.e. one which avoids not only death but also the inevitable separation, frustrated love and so on, which are basic ingredients of much seventeenth-century tragedy; Corneille, following Aristotle, points out that characters' fortunes can, in tragedy, move not only from good to bad but also from bad to good. Indeed, both Corneille and d'Aubignac insist more on the possible happy ending of tragedy - and hence on the superfluity of the term tragi-comedy - than does say, Samuel Chappuzeau, for whom, in 1674, a happy conclusion is the sole distinguishing feature of tragi-comedy.

A happy outcome, while possible in both forms, is a prerequisite of tragi-comedy. "Happiness", though, for a seventeenth-century dramatist, did not mean purely comic elements or "bouffonnerie", although the earliest tragi-comedy in France had indeed been a combination of tragedy

and comedy, simply juxtaposed. Some, like Phérotée de Lacroix, looked on tragi-comedy, with its mixture of various elements, as being more natural than tragedy, which remained on a different level, whatever the attempts to broaden the scope of the characters and the nature of the dénouement; but the mixture in tragi-comedy had to be controlled, for it was the over-exuberance, the exaggerated portrayals with their accompanying excess of incidents, which started the decline of the form from the heyday of regular tragedy in the early 1640s onwards.

Finally, linked to the question of the dénouement, there is a matter which preoccupied commentators of both tragedy and tragi-comedy: the inevitability of the outcome of a play, once the very form has been announced. Scudéry, in his Observations sur le Cid, mentions the limitations of a tragedy whose bounds the audience or reader can prescribe almost from the beginning; and d'Aubignac, in his turn, comments that the end of a tragi-comedy, too, can be foreseen, for such a play, by definition, cannot end unhappily. The same remarks would apply to comedy also, of course, and serve to emphasise the dramatists' need to work within the limits of his subject, to so co-ordinate and structure the various episodes that tension and dramatic interest are kept alive despite the inevitability of much of the action. Perhaps tragedy, with its range of dénouements, offers as much scope as either of the other two forms; but tragi-comedy and also comedy must, to compensate, introduce a variety of threads to the plot, while at

the same time striving to maintain a certain unity (or better, unification) of action. It is perhaps here, in the elements of surprise that lead up to the more or less foreseen conclusion, that tragi-comedy differs most from tragedy. Or does it? In the opinion of some critics, like Georges May, surprise is not only the means but also the end for a dramatist like Pierre Corneille²⁶; and who is to say that he is not largely correct, for we know little or nothing about what seventeenth-century France understood by the tragic element in tragedy and we cannot tell whether or not it always looked for it.

If this is realised, then arguments about the possibly didactic purpose of classical tragedy, the moral aims behind it and so on, fall into their proper perspective. Plaire et toucher is as common a concern as plaire et instruire in seventeenth-century France, and is backed up by P. Corneille's words in the first Discours in favour of "la naïve peinture des vices et des vertus"²⁷. Similarly, we should try to understand that the feelings stirred up - whether they be surprise, admiration, pity or fear - seem as often as not to be aroused not only in the audience but also (or perhaps exclusively) in the stage-characters, and that this play on the emotion of everyone involved in a performance is part of what the dramatist desires.

26. G. May, Tragédie cornélienne, tragédie racinienne, Urbana, 1948.

27. Writings on the theatre, p. 5.

All in all, then, it seems difficult and indeed artificial to try and separate tragi-comedy from tragedy, for in most respects the plays are, theoretically, similar in overall tone and construction. Some, like Le Cid, changed designation without significant alterations in content, while other plays, including some by Thomas Corneille, are called tragedies but are in fact the most romanesque of creations.

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Given this situation, it would seem profitable, when examining the dramatic effectiveness of Timocrate, to compare that play with other seventeenth-century tragi-comedies, especially with those written immediately before and after 1656. To complete the picture, a play such as Le Prince déguisé, dating from the mid-1630s, will provide both a parallel and a contrast to Thomas' best-seller. Our aim should be to establish two main points: how far does Thomas Corneille's romanesque play differ from contemporary or earlier tragi-comedies in structure; and what are the essential differences between Timocrate or Bérénice of the following year and the more obviously pure tragedies of the 1660s (particularly Thomas' Roman tragedies and Camma).

Scudéry's tragi-comedy Le Prince déguisé of 1634/5 has been mentioned by critics in connection with Timocrate, and it provides a close structural parallel from the heyday of tragi-comedy. Its belle intrigue has been praised by D'Aubi-

gnac in La Pratique du théâtre²⁸ but eighteenth-century critics like the frères Parfaict and La Vallière²⁹ point to the complexity of the plot, resulting largely from lack of attention to the unities. This will not be a criticism levied directly against Timocrate, where indeed Thomas Corneille manages to observe the recommendations of the three unities fairly well, provided that the spectator grants the author the benefit of the doubt over his initial situation. Certainly, in Le Prince déguisé, Scudéry uses the unities freely. The place is fairly unified, inside the town of Palermo, but the scene shifts considerably within that boundary, as he says in the Au Lecteur: "La face du Theatre, qui change cinq ou six fois entierement, à la representation de ce Poëme". The time, too, extends over several weeks. But given the date of the tragi-comedy, there is nothing particularly remarkable about this. Five or so years earlier, in the preface to Ligdamon et Lidias, his first play, Scudéry reserves the right to use the unities fairly freely. By the time of Didon (1635), he will be observing at least the unity of place.

Twenty years before Timocrate, Le Prince déguisé seems to have been a great success, too, to judge from the author's own words in the preface (1643) to his tragi-comedy Arminius: "Insensiblement nous voicy arrivez à ce bien-

28. Ed. cit., p. 67.

29. F. and C. Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, Paris, 1745-1749, vol. V, p. 130; La Vallière, Bibliothèque du théâtre français depuis son origine, Dresden, 1768, vol. II, p. 121.

heureux Prince déguisé, qui fut si longtems la passion & les delices de toute la Cour: jamais Ouvrage de cette sorte n'eût plus de bruit, & jamais chose violente n'eût plus de durée .."³⁰. Why? Largely because its plot is similar to Timocrate's and sets out to cause a similar surprise. But Scudéry's tragi-comedy is considerably less successful on several scores.

Six years before the action starts, Cléarque, son of Altomire king of Naples, while travelling disguised, falls in love with Argénie, heir to the Sicilian throne. He then returns to Naples, and his father asks Poliante, the king of Sicily, to give Argénie to his son in marriage. Poliante refuses, is taken prisoner by Altomire and dies soon after. The Sicilian king's widow, Rosemonde, swears vengeance on Naples and in particular on the unfortunate Cléarque, whom she suspects of the death. As in Timocrate, the reward for capturing the foreigner will be her daughter's hand.

Cléarque arrives and, disguised as Policandre, a gardener, succeeds in gaining Argénie's affections. But he has a rival for his attentions: Mélanire, the wife of the Sicilian queen's gardener. Mélanire sees through Policandre's disguise and tells all to Rosemonde. As neither Cléarque/Policandre nor Argénie can agree on who loved whom first and who, therefore, has precedence in dying at the

30. Cit. Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. V, p. 131.

stake, they resort to choosing champions who will fight it out within the week.

As good luck will have it, each escapes from prison and, unknown to the other, appears as the other's champion. Champion Cléarque/Policandre not unnaturally wins the duel, but Argénie, who is thus saved, refuses to live on, whereupon Policandre reveals to queen Rosemonde that he is "ce Clearque odieux, mais pourtant innocent", whose head she has been after. Both Cléarque and Argénie desperately want to commit suicide, but Rosemonde tactfully sentences Policandre to death, while sparing the same person as Cléarque, and thus solving her dilemma.

Superficially, the play resembles Timocrate in structure, but there are notable differences. Broadly speaking, Timocrate will be seen to be a much more regular and credible example of its genre. Scudéry's errant prince, for example, is disguised as a knight when he first falls in love with Argénie; his disguise in the play itself is that of a gardener. Already the illusion, at the level of the characters and especially between audience and actors, is less than in Th. Corneille's play. The widowed queen Rosemonde of Sicily wrongly suspects Cléarque of killing her husband, for he died of heartbreak, while the king of Argos had died in the war with Crete (although just possibly at the hand of Timocrate's father, despite Cléomène's denial of this in Timocrate, act I, scene 3). There is no council scene in Scudéry's play, and the rival love which there is - the gardener's wife's passion for Cléarque/Policandre - is

thankfully absent from Th. Corneille's. There is no equivalent in this early play of the rapid changes of fortune of the central act of Timocrate and of Trasile's revelations which follow in act IV. The events which complete the noeud and lead up to queen Rosemonde's dilemma are considerably more melodramatic than those that face the Argive queen: a possible double suicide with burnings at the stake; recourse to champions; multiple disguises; and pitiful, final pleas for death. Yet the solution that Rosemonde finds is altogether neater: she understands the paradox of the split personality, and sees that, by condemning one half and pardoning the other, she can escape from the vow she has earlier taken. The queen of Argos will be less perspicacious ("J'aime ce que je perds, & je perds ce que j'aime / ... / Je ne fais point de vœux qui n'aillent contre moy" - Timocrate, V.5), and it requires the Cretan seizure of Argos for her to devolve her power on to Timocrate reconnu and so end the play.

So much for the main outlines. Le Prince déguisé can be seen to be a relatively fussy, irregular play, and a host of small details point to the lesser merit of it when compared to Timocrate. Both plays require to fill in the background in the early scenes, as does any tragedy or tragic-comedy. But in Timocrate, this is done quickly and relatively interestingly; the longest continuous speech in the exposition is Nicandre's forty-four lines in I.2. With this should be compared the unbroken 157-line *récit* which Cléarque makes to the gentilhomme Lisandre in the opening

scene of Scudéry's tragi-comedy, on the basis of Lisandre's excuse that he does not know of past events because "J'étois lors / Dans ces heureux climats d'où viennent les thresors". Part of this fascinating history-lesson brings out the parallel sea-settings of the two plays, but Scudéry holds nothing back in Cléarque's account of the Neapolitan attack on king Poliante of Sicily:

Par de longs cris aigus que le soldat envoie,
Il se fait un chaos de tristesse et de joye,
Les vaisseaux accrochez sont horribles à voir,
On attaque, on resiste, et tous font leur devoir:
L'on combat main à main, et chacun s'evertuë,
Pour trainer avec soy l'ennemy qui le tuë ...
Un vaisseau coule à fond, un autre tout brisé,
De crainte d'estre pris se fait voir embrasé,
Et couvrant le Soleil d'une espaisse fumée,
Dérobe aux yeux de tous, et l'une et l'autre armée..

(Le Prince déguisé, I.1.)

The luxuriance ("baroque" quality?) of the detail in Le Prince déguisé comes out in other ways. During the last scene of the first act, when Rosemonde is threatening vengeance on the Neapolitans, especially Cléarque, our hero is hiding behind a pillar; his long-suffering friend Lisandre advised him in the previous scene (sc. 5) "Couvrez-vous d'un pilier". Later, in act III, when Mélanire begins to see through Cléarque / Policandre, we have a series of multiple disguises which will make Timocrate pale in comparison. The gardener's wife hides as Cléarque / Policandre approaches (III.3). The prince in turn conceals himself (III.4) when he hears Argénie coming ("Couvrons nous toutefois de ceste palissade"). After all this, the resourceful Mélanire does not even succeed in piercing Cléarque / Policandre's identity

first. For Philise, Argénie's fille d'honneur, anticipates the discovery that "Policandre" is not just a gardener, thus reducing the impact of the event both for Mélanire and for the audience. She says to Argénie, in scene 5:

Et puis, qui peut scavoir si ce n'est point un Prince,
Que l'amour ait conduit dedans ceste Province?
Bien qu'il soit dangereux de se taire et brusler,
Peut-estre le respect l'empesche de parler.

At the start of act V, too, Argénie will adopt a disguise - she changes garments with Philise - in order to escape from imprisonment and appear as "champion" of Cléarque / Policandre.

Later in this last act, the reaction of queen Rosemonde contrasts noticeably with the queen of Argos' remarks after the unmasking of Timocrate / Cléomène. The Argive queen will be angry, but controlled, breaking into antitheses which show her dilemma, but also her ability to see and express, if not solve it:

Puis-je donner la mort à qui je dois ma Fille,
Ou si je suis contrainte à ce funeste effort,
Puis-je donner ma Fille à qui je dois la Mort?

(Timocrate, IV.7)

Rosemonde, in the earlier tragi-comedy, is rather less effective, although perhaps more natural, when she justifiably asks in act V scene 9: "Ce miracle nouveau me remplit de merveille: / Bons Dieux, qui veit jamais aventure pareille?"

Other infelicities exist which hardly enhance the true drama of the situation in Scudéry's play. There are a number of stage-directions which emphasise the artificiality of the actions. In II.6, Cléarque / Policandre says

to Argénie: "Je cache mon destin, et d'où je suis venu, / M'estant avantageux de n'estre pas connu", to which Scudéry adds: "Ces vers ont un double sens". So with the dramatic double suicide attempt by Angélique and Cléarque in V.9: "Elle se jette sur l'espée du Prince; mais on l'empesche", Scudéry warns his audience; and after Cléarque's desperate bid, "Comme il se veut tuer, la Reine le retient" (*ibid.*). But the author makes up for such frustrating disappointments by having the two "champions" actually duel on stage earlier in the same scene. Equally impressive is the "gros volume" from which Anthénor, chancelier de Sicile, reads in IV.7 when he informs Argénie and Cléarque that

Des amans, qui le premier aura
Monstré la sale ardeur qu'il nourrissoit en l'ame,
Afin de le punir, qu'il meure dans la flame.

The construction of Scudéry's tragi-comedy is, in the end, less taut than it might be and inferior to what we shall find in Thomas Corneille's 1656 play, as can be seen by a breakdown of characters and events in the various acts. Cléarque / Policandre is present in half the scenes (eighteen out of thirty-four), about the same as Cléomène / Timocrate (fifteen out of thirty), but Scudéry's hero appears regularly throughout the play: three times in Act I, five times in act II, four times in III and IV and twice in the last act. The virtue of Timocrate is that he maintains his bluff until the end of act IV by being virtually absent, as Cléomène, from the two preceding acts. In Scudéry, it is true, a climax is reached in the last, ninth scene of act V, where the champions duel, Cléarque reveals

his identity, he and Argénie attempt suicide and Rosemonde reaches her decision. Life in Palermo certainly had its busy moments ... But the invraisemblance of this is only heightened by earlier "leaks" or rumours, like Philise's in III.5, where she foresees that Policandre may not be just a gardener, without having sufficient insight to realise that he is neither a gardener nor Policandre. Thomas Corneille will arrange his crucial final interval well, for in it the queen of Argos has to begin her re-appraisal of the position and reflect on her decision, taken within the next eight scenes. In Le Prince déguisé, the death of the two lovers is ordered in the second scene of act IV; two scenes later, Argénie still does not know who the disguised Policandre is ("Mais dites votre nom") and it requires a further eleven scenes and an interval to pass before the hectic, concluding activities. The fifth act in particular is loosely engineered, with the grand sacrificeur de la Sicile and the ministre du temple de Palerme joining in, and Mélanire, the gardener's wife, still protesting her love (scene 4).

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Having looked at a typical tragi-comedy from the heyday of that form in the mid-1630s, and in order to have an idea of those with which Timocrate will directly compete, we could profitably examine two and comment on the others in the three or four years immediately prior to 1656. The first is D^u Ryer's Anaxandre, probably played in 1653 and

published in 1655; it seems to me to offer a good example of contemporary tragi-comedy which, although "simple" in structure, does not really succeed in interesting its audience. The second example, with which we could compare it, is another "simple" tragi-comedy, Boisrobert's Théodore, reine de Hongrie, performed in 1656 and published in November of the following year, soon after the appearance of Somaize's pedantic and at times malicious Remarques criticising it.

Du Ryer's Anaxandre is a play which, unlike most of his earlier tragi-comedies, has no physical disguise or recognition, although disguise occurs in the characters' feelings for each other; only Alphénor, the second of the two princes, is exempt from this and always speaks his mind. On the surface, it is a banal situation: Alphénor loves the king's daughter Céphise who loves Anaxandre, a captive prince, who in turn loves and is loved by Alcione, Céphise's younger sister. Finally, we learn in I.6 and III.1 that Prodote, Alphénor's confidant, brother of Céphise's confidante Astérie, and villain of the piece, has feelings for Alcione, largely "pour empêcher qu'un autre emporte un si grand bien" (I.6) and despite difficulties with his lower social rank.

Prodote's peace of mind will depend on his master's success with Céphise, whom the king intends to marry to Alphénor, but who shows little direct interest in him. Thus the bulk of the action in the play falls on the three characters Céphise, present in sixteen scenes out of thirty-three,

Anaxandre (thirteen) and Alcione (seven). Alphénor himself appears as infrequently as does Alcione, but Prodote's appearances equal Anaxandre's. The small number of scenes involving the younger princess can be attributed to the arrangement whereby the king her father has ordered her to feign love for Anaxandre, for political reasons, although it is clear in his first appearance in II.2 (the only one before act IV) that her feelings are real and not pretended. Equally, the rarity of Alphénor's rôle is explained by Céphise's unambiguous rejection of him in their interview in the opening scene of the play. The king, the princesses' father, has a small part: one scene in the first act, three in the third and two in the last.

The exposition has features which characterize the whole play and explain its unsatisfactory nature. The first act is dominated by Céphise and her confidante Astérie; neither Alcione nor Anaxandre appears until act II. Here, Anaxandre and his confidant Phédime monopolise attention in all eight scenes; only four other characters appear in the act, in one scene each. After act II, Phédime is not heard of again. The play is thus largely, though not exclusively, a revelation of character, with little internal action; what events there are come from outside the characters. Thus, at the end of act II, when Anaxandre is told that Céphise loves him and could secure his release if he reciprocates the feeling, he agrees; and although he hesitates in the next scene (scene 7), his mind seems made up. Then Prodote arrives (II.8) with the news that the

king is granting him provisional freedom, on "vostre seule foy" and this alters his obligations to Céphise, for it "me met en estat de ne plus écouter / Ce qui pourroit me vaincre, ou du moins me tenter." Again, in act V, when Anaxandre seems on the point of being forced to marry Céphise, with Alcione's unwilling agreement (sc.1), the elder sister, at first protesting that she is too ambitious to marry Alphénor, suddenly changes her mind, thanks to "un rayon d'une clairté Celeste" (scene 5).

These two incidents, while unexpected within the framework of the play, do not really affect the unity of action. One episode that does is the news, at the end of act IV, that Anaxandre's father, who has no part in the tragi-comedy, is prepared to end the war between his country and that of the princesses' father by marrying his son to Céphise; Alphénor, at the same time, is threatening to rebel if this plan goes through (IV.6). As it is, Anaxandre and Alcione occupy the opening scene of Act V and their determination that nothing should change, followed by Céphise's sudden acceptance of Alphénor, reduces the need for this péripétie and leaves the way open for the conventional happy ending.

Du Ryer's tragi-comedy can thus be seen to have several major defects. The change of fortune just mentioned could have been both dramatic and psychologically fruitful, but it comes far too late in the play, has no immediate effect, and is eventually completely overruled, when, in order to resolve the final details of the senti-

mental plot, Anaxandre reveals that ambassadors now inform him that his father is prepared for him to marry either princess (V.8). Prodote's rôle, while lengthy, is largely concerned with the static third act, and his love of Alcione is improbable. Indeed, it is the unevenness of progression in the action which is the play's greatest failing; the spread of material is not uniform and both dramatic tension and interest suffer accordingly. This is clearly brought out when one examines the characters' main actions. Alphénor, rejected by Céphise in I.1, leaves; and when in II.4 (his only meeting with his rival Anaxandre before the dénouement), he concludes from ambiguous replies that Céphise is loved by Anaxandre, he accepts the situation and departs. Anaxandre, as we have seen, while on the point of compromising himself to secure release, is able to step back from the brink at the end of act II, thanks to the king's generous gesture. Thus, at the close of this act, both Alphénor and Céphise are struggling to fulfil their ambitions, while Anaxandre and Alcione's mutual love seems fairly secure.

The third act brings Prodote's interests to the fore, but his attempt to make the king believe that Anaxandre loves Céphise rather than Alcione gets nowhere, for the king adheres to his original plan. The lack of progression in the whole of act III is continued through the first three scenes of act IV, until Céphise elicits from Anaxandre that he loves, not her, but Alcione (IV.4). It is only the news from Anaxandre's father, coming, significantly, imme-

diately after this discovery, that alters the position and makes Céphise a slightly interesting character; for without it, her eventual acceptance of Alphénor would merely coincide with her father's wishes.

Anaxandre, Du Ryer's last play, is interesting, if only by its obvious weaknesses. Dramatically, even the title character's ambiguous reply to Alphénor that "Si l'on a pû scavoir laquelle des deux (princesses) m'ayme, / L'on scait pour qui des deux mon amour est extrême" (II.4), is not fully worked out; the phrase is merely repeated twice by Alphénor, once at the end of the same scene, and again in the opening scene of act III, but to no effect. Love clearly plays an important rôle, for a marriage arrangement is the spur to resistance at the start, while, at a deeper level, the desire for love leads to scenes like IV.3 where two princesses anxiously ask Anaxandre which of them he loves. But if Céphise's struggle between amour and orgueil is carefully depicted, it at no point catches the spectator's interest, for although she is the only character to develop, she does so unconvincingly; and Alcione's is too short a rôle to compensate adequately. Even Anaxandre, present throughout act II, fails to make his attitude clear until he is alone with Céphise in the second half of act IV. The action of the play, though, is largely unified, and time and place probably completely so, although details of both are left vague by Du Ryer. Liaison des scènes is observed, there are only four main monologues and no lengthy récits.

Boisrobert's tragi-comedy Théodore, reine de Hongrie

appeared in the same year as Timocrate, yet the differences are startling³¹. The list of characters is even further reduced; Théodore, her lady-in-waiting and relative Irène and the king's only brother, Tindare, are available in all the five acts, but the king Ladislas does not appear until IV.2 and Ramèse, the capitaine des gardes, is equally absent. Irène and Ladislas have confidants, but neither is a major figure.

The action proceeds logically, almost mathematically, with one major item in each act. In I.5, Tindare discloses that it is the queen, Théodore, and not Irène that he loves; in II.4, Irène finally reveals this information to the queen. The middle of the play sees the ultimate step of Tindare declaring his love to Théodore, and this is followed, in the last scene, by news of Ladislas' imminent return. Tindare again takes the initiative in act IV by suggesting to the king that it was his wife who had made the first approaches to him ("(Elle) passa brusquement dès le troisième iour, / A l'insolent adieu d'un criminel amour"), and Théodore's death is ordered. The last act is dominated by the rehabilitation of the queen, begun when Ramèse, saying that he has carried out the execution, produces a letter from Tindare to the queen, proving the brother's guilt, and continued when Théodore, who had not

31. It would be useful eventually if some scholar of seventeenth-century French drama were to provide a study in depth of all plays produced in a specific calendar or theatre year.

in fact been killed, re-appears to beg Ladislav to show mercy.

Théodore does not appear in the first act; this is quite normal practice and accords well with the nature of the story, but Boisrobert has some difficulty in filling his seven scenes without her. The play is opened, not by a major character in dialogue with a minor, but by the two confidants, introducing the two young people of the second scene and explaining their apparent break, for Tindare loves, but refuses to say whom. Irène eavesdrops on Tindare's startling revelation, in scene 5, then leaves Tindare to a proper monologue in scene 6 before closing the act with her confidante Carinte. Three scenes - the third, fifth and sixth - are thus virtually monologues, and the last two of the seven scenes are rather repetitive. Tension is reasonably maintained, because of the possible incestuous situation, but its effect is reduced by Irène's exaggerated wrath in scene 7 and her passionate desire to seek Tindare's death.

Act II, with its four scenes, one of which is only a few lines, appears short, in comparison with the third act, which has three times as many, and could thus be compared to Boisrobert's other tragi-comedy of the period, Cassandre, where act III is much longer than II. But in fact, act II covers fifteen pages of text, while III only runs to twenty-one - the difference lies in the pace of the action. Act II of Théodore is indeed fairly slow: Irène believes she has explained the situation fully enough to the queen, but

Théodore merely thinks that Irène is in love with Tindare (scene 1), and this position is maintained in scene 2, even although the king's brother believes that the queen is aware of all the facts. Boisrobert makes full use of ambiguity, for Irène's name is only pronounced at the end of the second scene; and it is left to the latter to give Théodore the first inkling of Tindare's love for her. So far, then, events have been handled reasonably skilfully, if a trifle heavily in places. The third act, despite its quick-fire scenes, is less successful: Tindare's declaration of love (III.3) suffers from the queen's awareness that it will come, and gives rise to a feeling of pleasure in the brother-in-law that the queen was not as taken aback as he had expected. Scenes 5 to 12 are then occupied by Tindare's further attempt to send a letter to Théodore via Téralde his confidant - the repetition of situations here is only ended in the last scene when the king's return is announced.

Like Thésée, Ladislas returns to an extremely difficult situation; and like him, too, he condemns, on the basis on inadequate information (differing from Théodore herself who, although convinced of Tindare's guilt at the end of act II, had decided to keep the story quiet). The action moves forward with his condemnation of his wife, but a link is built into act V when we learn in IV.7 that Ramèse has not yet carried out the deed. All seems lost in the middle of act V, but the tragi-comedy merits its title by the re-appearance of the victim and her successful pleas for mercy for Tindare.

The subject of Boisrobert's play laid itself open to attack, and the cantankerous Somaize took up the cudgels wielded only a month or two before by d'Aubignac in his Pratique du théâtre (whom he quotes), when, in his Remarques, he criticises, inter alia, the lack of verisimilitude in the plot. Vraisemblance, says Somaize, "qui est la première règle du Poëme Dramatique, & celle que nostre Auteur a la moins suivie" is apparent neither in the build-up of the action nor in the dénouement, for Tindare's crimes should have been punished. In as much as the criticisms seem more a moral judgement (and a naïve one at that) than a comment on the number and structuring of the various elements of the plot, what Somaize says falls outside our study. But if the initial situation is accepted, it can be seen that the plot is handled soberly, that an effort has been made to maintain dramatic tension at the close of the acts; the unities of time, place and action are well preserved, and the outcome, resting as it does in Ramèse's purely human hands, does not violate the facts presented in earlier acts. Somaize may at best be right in criticising the numerous a parte in the play³².

Anaxandre and Théodore, reine de Hongrie thus present two examples of tragi-comedies from the mid-1650s and, while both have common features - maintenance of the unities, including that of action, use of love as a spring for the

32. A. de Somaize, Remarques sur la "Théodore" de l'auteur de "Cassandre", Paris, au Palais, n.d. (1657), pp. 16, 21-22 and 92-103.

action, and so on -, there are important differences. Du Ryer's play handles disguise in feelings, if not physical mistaken identity, and the initial situation is rather more complex than in Boisrobert's tragi-comedy. The earlier play lacks the continuing progression of the second, and has to resort to a change of fortune, which goes far beyond the return of Ladislás in Théodore. What of other tragi-comedies in the years immediately preceding Timostrate's appearance?

As in the two plays just examined, love is seen as a necessary ressort, in works by Montauban, Boisrobert again and Quinault. Isabelle in Quinault's Le Fantôme amoureux (probably performed in 1656) shows the same kind of hesitant love or pudeur as can be seen in Du Ryer's Anaxandre. In his Séleucus, performed in 1652 or 1653, and printed in 1654, Montauban emphasises the importance of the love-affair by the slight but significant changes he makes to his historical sources. Justin, in his History of the world, books XXVII and XXVIII, gives Olympias (the dramatist's Olympie) two sons and Laodice, the Syrian queen, two also: Séleucus and Antiochus. Montauban lets Laodice keep Séleucus, the title-character, but turns Antiochus into Olympie's son and calls him Antigonus. In order that there may be a tidy, double-love plot, each queen is given a daughter, Alcyonée to Laodice and Eryphile to Olympie. Antigonus, too, is freed of the historical blame for having killed Béronice, as Montauban places this on the shoulders of his father Antiochus Theos, and the relationship between the two families is strengthened and made more dramatically

suitable by having the dead Béronice depicted as Olympie's mother-in-law.

Disguise and the resultant mistaken identity are popular. In his Le comte de Hollande, played in 1652 or 1653 and shown to have a certain parallel in P. Corneille's Héraclius³³, Montauban has Palamède masquerade as Séleucus, son of king Fernand of Friesia, who, as luck would have it, has not seen his son since birth. Sophronie, Palamède's sister, is disguised as Séleucus' sister, Laure - both situations arising because of love. Le comte de Hollande, in fact, typifies the ridiculous extents to which an uncontrolled disguise play can go, for all vraisemblance and even audience identity is lost when, at the end of three successive acts, the king is unable to tell the duc de Zélande, who has been promised his daughter's hand, which young lady is his daughter. "O Ciel! où sommes-nous, & qu'est-ce que j'entends", says Fernand in II.3, and when in IV.4 he is no further advanced, little sympathy is evoked by his cry: "Ah! Pere malheureux, infortuné Monarque". When at last Laure's aged gouvernante arrives on the scene and clears up the problem in the nick of time ("Dieux! c'est la Gouvernante, & que je croyois morte"), it is hard to accept that all along "j'en avois, mes enfans, quelque pressentiment" (V.4).

In a slightly later tragi-comedy, Cassandre, performed in October 1653, Boisrobert starts with a simple initial

33. Lancaster, History, vol. III, pp. 155-156.

situation (love of Astolfe, son of the duc de Cardone, for princess Cassandre; love of D. Moncade, a Spanish nobleman, for Isabelle, Astolfe's sister, who in turn is loved by D. Père) and complicates it by misunderstanding and a supposed identity mix-up before resolving it as it began. By misinterpreting letters, Astolfe at first believes that Cassandre may be in love with D. Moncade, but by II.3 the two lovers have expressed their mutual affection. Then, in a 59-line récit, the duc tells Astolfe that Cassandre is his sister and that hence they must part, but the news is not given to Cassandre until the end of act III, and then without reasons. Only in V.3 will the duc inform both Cassandre and Isabelle that the former is his daughter, and this situation is then reversed by the arrival of Cassandre's long-absent gouverneur, who puts matters right.

Almost inevitably, disguise plays such as Cassandre or Le comte de Hollande give rise to repetition. In Cassandre, for example, act IV in particular, leading up to the Cassandre - Duc - Astolfe meeting in the last scene, covers much of the ground of acts II and III (II.4 and IV.1; III.7 and IV.3, and so on). The need may be there if, as in Boisrobert's play, one or two of the characters know the truth (or the supposed truth) fairly early on, while the others do not; but the repetition must be skilfully and briefly handled, not extended to the ten pages of Boisrobert's act IV scene 6.

Linked to this problem and perhaps common to all tragicomedies, and tragedies as well, is the maintenance of

dramatic tension. H.C. Lancaster, for example, finds that in Montauban's Le comte de Hollande "the suspense is well sustained"³⁴ - but is it? King Fernand, free after twenty years of captivity, tells his supposed son in I.1 that he is no doubt acquainted with the past story - then proceeds to retail it for 89 lines, having already had fifty lines to himself earlier in the scene! Dramatic excitement

is scarcely induced when the characters themselves forget they are playing parts and answer to their real names (I.2; II.5). What of the rather ridiculous battle of words between Sophronie, pretending to be Laure, and Laure, who protests her identity (II.3), to say nothing of the wait for the aged, if enterprising gouverneur of Séleucus to turn up and reveal all or the stubbornness of the other characters, refusing not only to believe what is said but to say anything helpful themselves? Among contemporary tragi-comedies, Quinault's Le Fantôme amoureux goes furthest in its melodramatic exposure of a mutilated corpse (all grisly details provided: I.8 and II.4), use of a convenient underground "mine" for visiting one's beloved, with one's hapless rival conveniently falling into it at the end of an act ...

From what has been said about the last few plays, it is clear that the dénouement of tragi-comedies in the 1650s was not always brought about by the previous action or by foreseeable events. In his Séleucus, admittedly a tragi-

34. Ibid., p. 155.

comédie héroïque, and a rather undistinguished, rigidly compartmentalised play, Montauban solves the situation by an uprising of Syrians. In his Le comte de Hollande, a long-despaired-of gouvernante turns up in the nick of time, while in Boisrobert's Cassandre, D. Bernard arrives half-way through the last act to disprove the duc de Cardone - at least he has written proof to back up his statements, which is more than D. Bernardo in Villegas' source play had. Thus the various plots are solved, "happily" in that no major figure perishes and that natural justice is seen to be done; but the outcome does not always depend simply on skilfully manipulated, well-prepared incidents.

The characters are noble, or are supposed to be so; indeed, in Quinault's Le Fantôme amoureux, Alphonse provides us with a defence of power even when the wielder of authority could be said to be unjust:

Il (le duc de Ferrare) est mon Prince encor malgré sa
tirannie,
Le destin des Sujets dépend des Souverains.
Un crime devient juste en partant de leurs mains,
Et malgré leurs rigueurs, si ces Dieux de la terre
Doivent être punis, c'est d'un coup de Tonnerre. (II.4)

The action is in general unified, given the defects mentioned above, although a close analysis of a play like Cassandre would show that the secondary love-affair - that between the two Spanish noblemen and Isabelle - , while occupying the greater space in the exposition, fades out after III.5 and leaves the main action in the last two acts to Cassandre and Astolfe. The example is a useful one, for a subordinate plot is necessary so that Astolfe can suspect that he has a rival for Cassandre's hand and react accordingly

when he, alone among the five in love, is informed of his "true" identity by the duc in act II; the link between the main and the secondary actions is effected by the hackneyed intercepted and misinterpreted letter. Technically, none of the plays mentioned is brilliant - there are often a parte, frequent stage-directions, an occasional weak liaison. But the basic mixture is there, the structure has been worked out, and it only needs a skilful hand, with a touch of imagination, to turn an interesting form into a masterly one.

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Such an event occurs with Timocrate, first performed at the end of 1656. Before studying the play, notice must be taken of remarks that Thomas makes in the important Au Lecteur. Here, the author answers two objections, and in so doing, makes clear his position with regard to the very nature of drama. For Thomas, as indeed for Pierre in the 1660 critical writings and in earlier prefaces, the notion of vraisemblance is important, and has to be carefully defined. Aristotle, says Thomas, "nous apprend qu'il est vray semblable que plusieurs choses arriuent contre le vraysemblable", and this argument serves as a justification for his play, where "i'aduoüe que Timocrate est fort adroit & fort heureux dans sa conduite, & qu'il faut l'estre beaucoup pour trouuer toujours au besoin des occasions si justes & si fauorables, de passer comme luy d'un party à l'autre selon les diuers interests qui l'y obligent". But for Thomas, his hero's individual actions are not improbable at all: "il ne fait rien qui soit impossible, & tout ce qui

peut arriuer, sans violenter beaucoup l'ordre commun de la nature, doit estre reputé vray semblable".

The subject as a whole, then, benefits from the verisimilitude of the component actions. In putting this point forward, Thomas would seem to anticipate - Timocrate is published in February 1658 - the important idea made by Pierre in the opening paragraph of the first Discours of 1660 and continued in the second, that the subject can or even should be invraisemblable, provided that the treatment is vraisemblable or nécessaire. Both authors would admit that the initial situation may be improbable - what is essential is that the various acheminements and episodes should in themselves be credible and clearly motivated. This will be a point worth examining, for the Au Lecteur which mentions criticism of this point appeared only eight months after the publication, in June 1657, of d'Aubignac's Pratique du théâtre, where the abbé had provided a passionate defence of vraisemblance, "l'essence du Poëme Dramatique" and "la seule lumière du Theatre". Historical truth by itself and mere possibility are unsuitable in plays, says the abbé: "il n'y a que le Vraysemblable qui puisse raisonnablement fonder, soustenir et terminer un Poëme Dramatique: ce n'est pas que les choses veritables et possibles soient bannies du Theatre; mais elles n'y sont receuës qu'entant qu'elles ont de la vray-semblance"³⁵.

35. Ed. cit., pp. 76, 253 and 77. Thirteen years before his Discours, it is true, P. Corneille had envisaged possible lack of verisimilitude in the sujet (1647 Au Lecteur to Héraclius, M.-L., vol. V, pp. 146-147); see note 59 below.

The second point that Thomas makes in the Au Lecteur is related to the question of vraisemblance just treated. The last act of the play had been criticised as being superfluous, for by the end of act IV Cléomène and Timocrate have been shown to be one and the same person. Two remarks occur to the author, one concerning the play up to this point, the other the full significance of the dénouement. "Les trois premiers Actes", he says, "ne seruent que d'acheminement à mettre la Reyne dans l'obligation de deux serments qui la forcent de faire espouser sa fille à celuy mesme qu'elle ne se peut dispenser de perdre". This position, still true at the end of the fourth act, resembles the situation in Héraclius (1647), where Phocas finds himself in an equally impossible dilemma, and it must, in each case, be followed by some solution - for a rule of drama is that the futures of all the main characters should be clear to the audience before the play ends.

But the conclusion to Timocrate had to be carefully managed: Thomas, in fact, devotes eight scenes to his last act and even at the end of scene 7, the queen of Argos is still criticising her possible son-in-law in no uncertain terms. Thomas adds, in the Au Lecteur: "Je laisse à iuger ... s'il m'estoit permis de finir Timocrate par vn sentiment de generosité qui auroit porté la Reyne incontinent après sa recognoissance, à violer les serments qu'elle auoit faits de vanger la mort de son mary, en faueur de ce qu'elle doit à Cleomene; l'Auditeur n'auroit-il pas eu lieu de me dire qu'il attendoit autre chose de cette exacte religion que les Anciens auoient à les obseruer,

& de l'inquietude où la devoit reduire cette contrarieté des serments ausquels elle s'estoit temerairement engagée?"

The story of Timocrate is well-known and one need only recapitulate the main lines. The "source" of the play is, as the author tells us in the last paragraph of the Au Lecteur, the eighth part of La Calprenède's novel Cléopâtre, which started to appear in 1646. Yet the story of Alcamène / Alcimédon and Ménalippe, while initially similar to that of Timocrate / Cléomène and Eriphile, is far from exact in all details. Thomas, like his elder brother, has taken a subject and moulded it to suit his dramatic purposes; as he says, La Calprenède's tale "m'a fourny les premieres idées de cét ouvrage". The king of Argos, at war with Démochare, king of Crete, had died in imprisonment and his daughter's hand has been claimed by the Cretan Cléomène. On attacking Crete, the widowed Argive queen is repelled by Timocrate, who soon succeeds to his father Démochare's throne and besieges Argos. As Cléomène, Timocrate takes part in a discussion (I.3) on whether peace should be obtained by giving Eriphile in marriage to Timocrate, and is the sole person to advise acceptance of the Cretan offer. The queen refuses this solution and says that Eriphile will marry the eventual captor of Timocrate. The hero dispatches two of his three rivals and takes prisoner the third, Nicandre (III.4). Almost immediately, Nicandre is released (III.5) and Cléomène enters, announcing that he has captured Timocrate (III.6). Suspicions are aroused that the prisoner may not in fact be Timocrate, and

Trasile, a friend of the Cretan king, unaware of what is happening, fails to confirm that it is Timocrate who has been captured (IV.6). Act IV ends with the exposure of Cléomène's disguise and the last act contains the queen's dilemma, Nicandre's intervention, the arrival of the Cretan in Argos, the abdication of the queen and the final victory of Timocrate, who will marry Eriphile.

Before we examine the exposition, the noeud and the dénouement of Timocrate in detail, a word about its overall structure. Virtually all the action takes place on the Argos side; at least one of their representatives is present in every scene. Crete, with Timocrate and Trasile, is absent until act IV scene 6, when Trasile appears; Timocrate himself is only featured in the last five scenes (V.4-8). Before this, of course, he is active as Cléomène, but only in ten scenes out of the twenty-two in the first four acts. His presence is frequent in acts I and IV, but rare in II and III (one appearance in each). The two kings Chresphonte and Léontidas feature only once, in act I.

The action, in fact, is largely a series of dialogues involving the four Argive characters: the queen, Cléomène, Eriphile and Nicandre. Only one scene of the play is a pure monologue, and even it (Eriphile, III.1) takes the form of stances. A plot such as that of Timocrate does not lend itself to the serious deliberations which characterise seventeenth-century tragic monologues. But each act, apart from act III, starts off with a semi-monologue by a main character with his or her confidant, and there are

other cases in the "tragedy" where this occurs (II.3; III.2 and 7; V.3). Apart from these monologues, though, the play consists principally of dialogues, at least until the dénouement, with occasional scenes embracing three main characters (I.3 and III.6 with the queen, Cléomène and Nicandre; IV.6 with the first two and Trasile).

A distinguishing feature of Timocrate, though, is the importance of the confidant. The princess Eriphile has two, and taken together they appear twenty-seven times in a play of 30 scenes. Mostly, one or the other is there, singly, to advise Eriphile, but both appear in six scenes when the queen is present. Nicandre's confidant, Arcas, is busy, too, making fifteen appearances, one more than Nicandre himself, in fact. Conversely, Cléomène's lack of a confidant is vital, for both the audience and other characters must be kept in the dark about his true identity, and his skill and daring are heightened by his ability to act alone. Like the twins in Anouilh's L'Invitation au château, he cannot, of course, appear in both guises simultaneously.

The pattern of action is thus remarkably unified and normal and clearly the suspense which marks Timocrate and presumably was the prime factor in its box-office success must go beyond an external analysis such as this. The play increases in speed as it progresses - four scenes in each of the first two acts, seven in acts III and IV, and eight in the last. While a steady increase is common in seventeenth-century tragedy³⁶, the difference between the two

36. J. Scherer, La Dramaturgie classique en France, p. 199.

opening acts and the last three is important. Eriphile does not appear at all in act I, where the attention is focussed on Nicandre, Cléomène and, to some extent, on the queen of Argos (scene 3). The princess's turn comes, though, in act II, where the only other two characters are Nicandre (scene 2) and Cléomène (scene 4), and she will go on to dominate the play as far as presence is concerned, being on stage seventeen times in comparison to Nicandre's fourteen and the queen's twelve appearances.

Act I, traditionally the expository act, is important, not only for the information it conveys concisely, but for the tension it arouses, by the mystery and unsolved problems mentioned. The entrée en jeu is skilfully managed, for Timocrate is before Argos, but Cléomène, the latter's defender, has mercifully returned to base. The audience is thus prepared for a forthcoming struggle, with its arguments and counterarguments, but is also already well-disposed towards Cléomène - this solves Thomas' problem of how to arouse enthusiasm for a Timocrate who does not, and cannot, appear until the game is up. Two points in the very opening scene serve to heighten the audience's reaction: time is shown to be pressing, through references to déjà, dès ce jour, l'orage qui s'appreste and (le) besoin qui la presse,

and secondly, Cléomène's arrival back is an occasion for Arcas to tell Nicandre about him and hence let Nicandre reveal Chresphonte, Léotidas and even Eriphile to the audience.

Curiosity is increased in scene two when we learn that Cléomène, although twice defender of Argos, had left the city without permission. No satisfactory reason is given by him for his absence: fate is invoked, rather ambiguously, as the main cause. Cléomène's disappearance is paralleled by our learning, in scene 2, of Timocrate's miraculous re-appearance after being presumed dead and his assumption of Royal power in Crete on the death of his father Démochare. A final hint to the audience that Cléomène and Timocrate can never appear together is contained in Nicandre's account of how the queen of Argos had decided to wage war on Crete without Cléomène, and how she had been driven off by Timocrate.

The necessary jigsaw puzzle of events is thus being slowly assembled, providing not only the necessary story-so-far facts, but also a carefully-programmed recital of presences and absences, without which the plot would flounder. Past events have been adequately sketched in for the present dilemma to be evoked in scene 3, a council scene such as Corneille uses in Cinna or Pompée, but here with four, widely-ranging views expressed. Each in its way is provocative and could orientate the play in an important direction. Chresphonte's advice that the Cretan ambassador be killed raises the spectre of an invasion by Timocrate;

Léontidas' recommendation that nothing be done is potentially as dangerous as Nicandre's, that war be resolutely waged. Only Cléomène advises acceptance of Timocrate's bargain, and when, in the next scene, Nicandre learns of his love for Eriphile, this rival for the princess's hand is as bemused as Maxime at Cinna's apparently self-contradicting advice to Auguste in the deliberation scene of that play.

Amidst doubts of how the king of Argos met his death at Démochare's court, the widow decides in favour of vengeance and offers Eriphile's hand to the captor of Timocrate. The diverse strands of the plot have thus been limited, the advice of the two neighbouring kings has been rejected (and hence their rôles virtually dispensed with) and the spotlight can now fall on Nicandre and Cléomène in their dealings with Eriphile. Perhaps dealings is the wrong word, for Nicandre only meets her once before act V and Cléomène only twice; but Eriphile and Nicandre will successively occupy the stage (the former continuously from II.1 to III.4 and the latter from the following scene, III.5, to IV.3), while Cléomène is busy elsewhere - he has only three appearances in these two and a half acts.

Compared with act I, act II is transitional and relatively static, as will be the fourth act. Indeed, one can see an attempt by Thomas to vary the rhythm of his action by increasing the speed, in various ways and for different reasons, in alternate acts: I, III and V. Act II's main purpose is to portray the feelings of Eriphile for Cléomène, whose love for her has been shown at the end of the opening

act. Yet Eriphile is neither a very sympathetic nor a particularly effective character, and her attitudes in act II and the opening scene of act III are as off-putting as those of another young girl, Placidie in Thomas' Stilicon, whose fierté and orgueil forbid her to marry below her station in life. Within these five scenes, then, she can move from expression of love for Cléomène (II.1, with her confidante) to rejection of him even if he conquers Timocrate (the stances of III.1). The argument that lack of status is no bar provided merit can be proved is discarded a few scenes later, and even if this rejection is but a temporary one, its position in the play serves to emphasise the essentially negative value of Eriphile's love.

It is paralleled by her treatment of Nicandre, urged to defeat Timocrate and thereby gain her hand, but dismissed in the very next scene, when the princess reveals to her confidante that he, too, lacks foolproof credentials. On the one hand, all four suitors have been warded off (there will soon be only two left, anyway), and at the same time opposition to Timocrate has been strengthened, even in the case of Cléomène, who has had to renounce the advice he gave the queen in the council scene of act I.

This skilful counterbalancing of situations, movement from one position to its apparent opposite, is continued in act III, where the rhythm again increases. Only here, in fact, in the admittedly strategic central act, do the action and the resultant quidproquos reach the level of incredibility which much criticism suggests is maintained

throughout the play. Into act III are compressed the tales about Nicandre, Trasile and Timocrate, and in comparison the fourth act will provide the leisurely, inexorable unmasking of the impostor, the fifth the queen's long drawn-out decision to abdicate, an anticlimax, perhaps, but still necessary.

The movements in the third act are well-engineered. Eriphile's unwillingness to accept Cléomène is balanced, not only, as we have seen, by the opening scene of act II, but again by scene 6 of act III, after the discomfiture of Nicandre, and thus the audience's interest is aroused for what will happen in the interval after act III and in the subsequent acts. Even as early as the second scene of the central act, Eriphile learns that Trasile was captured by Nicandre, not by Cléomène - but her suggestion that Cléomène must be responsible shows that she is still thinking of him, and this offsets the effect of the stances in scene 1, while foreshadowing scene 6.

Nicandre's fortunes oscillate wildly throughout the act, but the balance is finally in his disfavour. His victory (the taking prisoner of Trasile) is countered by his own capture by Timocrate - or so the story runs. This would destroy all his hopes of winning Eriphile, even although Chresphonte and Léontidas are now dead, and puts him, as scene 4 recounts, in the invidious position of being bartered for Trasile. His release by Timocrate is shameful enough, but is made more so by Cléomène's reported capture of Timocrate, in much less advantageous circumstances. Nicandre's military defeat at the hands of Crete leads to

his sentimental defeat by Cléomène (scene 6). The re-establishment of Cléomène's fortunes, and his hopes of winning Eriphile required Nicandre's capture and his subsequent release by Timocrate, for otherwise Nicandre would have had precedence over Cléomène. To add to his poor image, Nicandre hints in the last scene (scene 7) that he would like Timocrate, captured by Cléomène, released in return for the favours which the Cretan leader had shown him.

Nicandre's victory over Trasile is needed in its turn, as it allows Cléomène to disappear from the Argos scene and appear as Timocrate, urging on the Cretans (scene 3) despite the capture of the prince sujet. The perspective of the play now widens: the queen of Argos' account describes Timocrate being seen in conflict with Argos. The two sides to Timocrate's personality are not only evoked separately in this act; the illusion of their existing at one and the same time is fostered. As Cléomène / Timocrate thus extends his visible range of operations, the field of rivals for Eriphile's hand narrows, for Timocrate kills Chresphonte and Léontidas. This may add new renown to his own reputation, but it also comes close in time to his capture by Cléomène (if we accept to look on this as possible, as we surely must do, for the audience can). Equally importantly, Th. Corneille effects another dramatic juxtaposition of circumstances: by the deaths of the two neighbouring kings, Nicandre is left to carry on the fight for Argos; yet in the second half of the act, he is discredited, and his valour and sentimental hopes are called in question.

The difficulty of his personal position at this moment is only underlined by the queen's determination (scene 5) to wage war all the more strenuously on Crete.

The rôle of Nicandre is important, principally, it should be clear by now, as a foil to Cléomène / Timocrate. The fortunes of the two men are at opposite poles at the close of act III, yet all is changed by the gradual unmasking of the supposed Timocrate, thanks to Trasile in act IV. It is significant, therefore, that at the start of act IV, Nicandre's plan to release the prisoner should be superseded by Arcas' suggestions (scene 1), but that both should give way to the information brought by Eriphile's confidante in scene 2. Cléomène's deception, already brought out in this scene, is cleared up, not by what he says or by what Nicandre or Arcas do, but by Trasile, whose actions are first reported and then seen when he appears in scene 6. Thus neither of the chief male characters present - Cléomène and Nicandre - can influence his own destiny. But in scene 4, before he is aware that he has been found out - the stichomythia argument with Nicandre (sc. 3) does not get as far as this - , Cléomène does attempt to make Eriphile appreciate Timocrate for what he is and this is part of the psychological preparation for the discovery that Cléomène and Timocrate are one person.

But it would be wrong to see the structure of the play as permitting the rise of Nicandre to compensate for the sudden fall of Cléomène. The fifth act does not allow of this interpretation, and even before the end of act IV,

Cléomène / Timocrate has secured from the queen of Argos a promise that he can marry Eriphile before she, the queen, disposes of him as she has vowed to do all along. So the question of whether act V is superfluous is not strictly relevant; the play would have to close even earlier, before the last scene of act IV, if it were to leave no loose ends.

By introducing the promise of marriage, Thomas Corneille has necessitated a fifth act and has also seen how to construct it. His queen plays a largely negative rôle in the tragedy as a whole, as a widow seeking advice and assuring contenders for Eriphile's hand that they will win it if they deserve it. Her dilemma on finding that, as she later puts it neatly (V.5) "J'aime ce que je perds, & je perds ce que j'aime", has often been held up to ridicule, and obviously, if she had simply to choose between letting Timocrate marry her daughter and putting him to death, that decision would be unconvincingly facile. But this is not so. The careful soundings taken in the council scene of act I reveal a lot about the queen's power of decision, and it is to be expected that she will only be able to make a two-stage decision about Timocrate.

Eriphile therefore holds one's attention in the first four scenes of act V, but clearly no decision can be made until the queen arrives. The first half of the act thus serves two purposes: it allows rumours to spread - that Cléomène has been discredited in the eyes of the people; that Crete is about to invade Argos again and so on -, and at the same time gives the queen the chance to make up her

mind. Even so, her speech in scene 5 is inconclusive, and it needs Nicandre's action, paradoxically, to make her give expression to her thoughts. Nicandre's admittance of the Cretans into Argos only speeds up an inevitable process and brings forward a decision which the queen was bound to make sooner or later.

That Timocrate is a fairly complex play should now be clear; but it is not excessively complicated. Rather, it is a marvellously skilful and well-designed juxtaposition of episodes, rumours, disguises and facts, with each piece carefully fitting into its place. Situations and events are counterbalanced in such a way as to heighten tension through changes in the characters' fortunes. The exposition is full, but clear and compact, and the rhythm of the remaining acts is successfully varied.

The characters are all noticeably noble - if one makes allowances for Cléomène's nobility through merit - and the ending is happy, in that only Chresphonte and Léontidas die, and they are minor figures serving Timocrate's greater glory. But whether the play is a tragedy or a tragi-comedy, on the basis of the definitions provided earlier in this chapter, is neither here nor there: certainly Lancaster's arguments³⁷ that Th. Corneille "wrote a tragi-comedy that would appeal to the altered taste of a public recovering from a civil war, but, by calling it a tragedy, he prepared the way for a return to a more nearly psychological kind of

37. History, vol. III, p. 184.

play" (and especially the latter) seem very weak. Although the title-character, or his alias, thanks to the quidproquo of the disguise, holds the centre of the stage, he does so despite frequent absence, especially in acts II and III. At these points, it is first Eriphile and then Nicandre who are present, but their rare appearances together perhaps symbolise the impossibility of a lasting friendship between them. The queen's rôle in the play is, as we have seen, limited, but it is through her that the main obstacle (the difference in nationality between Timocrate and Eriphile) and the dilemma that precedes the *dénouement* - how to keep the promise to Cléomène without putting him to death - are given expression.

What of the two main criticisms of the play, as reported in the *Au Lecteur*, and which are relevant to a consideration of the dramaturgy? When all is said and done, much of the action of the tragedy is not improbable in itself, given the initial situation, which the audience either accepts or refuses to accept. The author has been at pains to prepare his incidents, to allow for absences, to explain shifts of fortune in terms of the necessary interplay of characters. There are a dozen or so *récits* in the play, especially in the first three acts, but none of them is of any great length; much of the action is concentrated in front of the audience's eyes. Even the busy but well-organised central act is not impossible, and the play as a whole may well be less *romanesque* than is often supposed. Timocrate / Cléomène's single-handed victories, for example, are often seen as highly contrived - but what

about Nicandre's capture of Trasile, or the even more demanding promise by the queen of Argos (III.5) that she is prepared to fight Crete alone, for Cléomène is at this point believed dead and Nicandre captured (scene 4)? The one point that only strikes us après coup is how Nicandre, at the end of the third act, can fail to recognise Cléomène, when the same man, as Timocrate, had raised his visor to him, spoken ten lines and even embraced him (III.5)³⁸. Both in content and in form - the increasing number of scenes in each act; the general pattern of a dialogue between a main character and his confidant in the first scene giving way to scenes with two or more characters; the observance of the liaison des scènes convention and so on -, Timocrate is regular and its success, far from being invraisemblable, as Reynier claims³⁹, must depend on its merit. As Thomas says, in lines from the preface already quoted, "il (Timocrate) ne fait rien qui soit impossible, & tout ce qui peut arriuer, sans violenter beaucoup l'ordre commun de la nature, doit estre réputé vray semblable".

Equally, as I have tried to show, criticism of the last act is misplaced, for it fulfills a need in allowing the queen time for reflection. The intervals in any seventeenth-century tragedy are important, and those in Timocrate

38. Arcas tells us in III.4 that Cléomène is believed dead (we know his disappearance is due to his re-appearance as Timocrate). Could Nicandre be so convinced of this death that he fails to recognise a resurrected Cléomène, alias Timocrate, in III.6?

39. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 117.

are used intelligently and in a varied way. The one between acts I (Nicandre and Cléomène) and II (Eriphile and confidante), with little, if any, action occurring, is quite different, for example, from the next but one, for Nicandre and Arcas appear both in the closing scene of act III and the opening one of act IV. But the queen of Argos must be shown to be hesitant, if only to contrast with the enterprising Timocrate, and Thomas makes a virtue out of necessity by dramatically delaying the solution of the play until the very last scene. One may be tempted to compare the last act of Timocrate with that of Horace, equally criticised - but the purpose is different in each case. In Pierre's tragedy, Camille must not become the heroine, as she would if the play ended just after her death at the end of act IV; and Horace must be not merely pardoned by the king but given a newly defined task to perform ("Vis pour servir l'Etat", V.3, line 1763). For Thomas, the problem is not how to re-establish his title-character in the audience's favour and to some extent justify his action; he has to wind up the fortunes of the other characters - the princess, Nicandre, the queen herself - and show that, despite a final, conclusive victory of Crete over Argos (V.6), love wins over pride and theoretical hatred. Arguments such as Gustave Reynier's: "Personne ne s'avisa de penser que la donnée n'en était guère acceptable et que Timocrate aurait bien pu ne pas tant compliquer les choses si, après avoir gagné le coeur de la princesse, il s'était fait connaître sous son vrai nom"⁴⁰, just do not begin to be relevant to a dramatist.

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40. Ibid., p. 126.

What of the tragi-comedies written shortly after Timocrate, in the late 1650s and early 1660s? The authors are varied, but certain names stand out, and one in particular: after Chappuzeau, Morel, Montauban, Magnon come Scarron, Gilbert, Boyer, Du Ryer, Boisrobert and perhaps the best-known, Philippe Quinault, with his Le Fantôme amoureux, Amalasonte, Le Feint Alcibiade, Le Mariage de Cambise, Stratonice and Agrippa spread over a mere six or seven years. How do his tragi-comedies, and those of the other authors mentioned, compare dramaturgically with Le Prince déguisé of the mid-1630s and more particularly with Timocrate in 1656?

We saw, in examining Th. Corneille's "tragedy", how the source of the story can be pinpointed, traced back to a section of La Calprenède's novel Cléopâtre. Yet this only provided a point de départ for the events of the play, the various péripéties, which Thomas created and arranged to suit his dramatic purpose. Twenty years and more earlier, Scudéry was even more cavalier in choosing his material for Le Prince déguisé; Barbara Matulka, in her study of the play⁴¹, examines possible sources, mostly common-place themes (pp. 8-23), and concludes (p. 9) that "Scudéry ... did little else than work together a mosaic of literary motives, current themes and stock situations".

The same can be said of most of the tragi-comedies around the time of Timocrate. Somaize, in his Remarques on Boisrobert's Théodore, performed in 1656, accuses the

41. G. de Scudéry, Le Prince déguisé, ed. B. Matulka, New York, 1929

author of taking his story from De la Caze's tragi-comedy L'Inceste supposé, published some sixteen years earlier. But as Tenner has shown in his book on Boisrobert⁴², the accusations of verbal plagiarism are false and the order of scenes is quite different in several important places in the play, so much so that motivations for action are radically changed. Gilbert's Chresphonte, on the other hand, performed in 1657, has most of the historical background compressed into the first act, and historical facts are altered to suit the plot and the pattern of relationships which the author has dreamt up, for example the rôle of Chresphonte's rival, Tysamène, king of Argos⁴³.

In Amalasonte, played at the end of the same year, 1657, and which we shall be looking at in closer detail in connection with Thomas Corneille's tragedy La Mort de l'empereur Commode, Quinault uses Flavius Blondus, as Thomas will fifteen years later for Théodat, but he keeps little that is historical, apart from the names: the characters in the play, and the details are of his own invention. The same is true of Le Feint Alcibiade (1658), with its borrowings from Plutarch and contemporary novels, and Le Mariage de Cambise (performed the same year), whose sources are studied by Etienne Gros. The basic source is Herodotus, but Quinault effects major changes, and Gros concludes: "à part la donnée essentielle, plus ou moins

42. F.O. Tenner, François Le Metel de Boisrobert als Dramatiker, Leipzig, 1907, pp. 103-104.

43. Cf. E.J. Pellet, A forgotten French dramatist: Gabriel Gilbert, Baltimore, 1931, pp. 138-140.

déformée, et les noms, la tragi-comédie n'a pour ainsi dire plus rien d'historique... Le Mariage de Cambise est bien, en somme, ... un sujet d'invention"⁴⁴. Stratonice (1660) is rather different: both ancient historians - Plutarch and Appian - and a modern dramatist, Brosse, are used. But not only are important details from them suppressed, new ones are added which, together, form a substantially original play⁴⁵.

Study of some of the other main tragi-comedies of the period confirms that history was openly flouted, or considered unimportant; it is often impossible to determine where an author may have found his story, something that is rare in tragedy at the time. In the Au Lecteur to Timoclée ou la Générosité d'Alexandre, performed in 1658, Morel answers objections of historical infidelity by giving as wide a definition of the vraisemblable as Th. Corneille had done in Timocrate: "ie répondray qu'il n'importe pas que la chose soit ainsi arriuée effectivement; que c'est assez que cela soit vraysemblable & moralement possible". Discussing the plot of Scarron's Le Prince corsaire (1658), H.C. Lancaster says that it is one "which Scarron may well have derived from some novel of the period that has not yet been recognised as his source"⁴⁶. The origins of

⁴⁴. E. Gros, Philippe Quinault, sa vie et son oeuvre, Paris, 1926, p. 284.

⁴⁵. Ibid., pp. 291-296; C.J. Gossip, "Le rôle et les antécédents de l'Antiochus de Racine", Cahiers raciniens, XXI (1967), pp. 45-68.

⁴⁶. Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 137.

Boyer's Fédéric (1659) are unknown, and his Policrite of a year or two later, while drawn from an episode in Mlle de Scudéry's Grand Cyrus, is a compressed, less picturesque and, in several important details, different version of the story recounted there. Gilbert's Angélique et Médor, seven years after Chresphonte, has only suggestions from Italian poets and perhaps a few reminders from Chresphonte itself⁴⁷, while Mlle Desjardins' Le Favory takes its main lines from Tirso de Molina's El amor y el amistad, but adapts the facts in order to maintain suspense up until the end. Both Boisrobert's Cassandre and Quinault's Le Fantôme amoureux can be traced back to Spanish sources, but the latter especially goes its own way, while even Boisrobert has altered Villegas' La mentirosa verdad of 1636, as he informs us in his Au Lecteur: "Si Villegas Espagnol assez obscur, qui a esté assez heureux pour trouuer vn si beau noeud, eust eu la mesme fortune dans le desnouement, cette seule production l'auroit sans doute esgalé aux plus fameux Inuenteurs de sa nation, & de son siecle ... J'ay la vanité d'esperer que tu priseras peut-estre moins des richesses & des profusions de l'Auther, que ma petite Oeconomie".

Nothing is gained by labouring the point: with few exceptions, authors of tragi-comedy (like most authors of tragedy, too) took it upon themselves to construct their plays and the psychology of their characters as they saw fit, perhaps starting from a historically identifiable source, but adapting and expanding this as necessary. From

47. Ibid., pp. 543-544.

our point of view, in examining the dramaturgical aspects and quality of the play, this is perhaps no bad thing - for it means that the tragi-comedies were conceived of as theatre, not as versified and slightly dramatised prose.

At the same time as this freedom was given to (or taken by) playwrights, it is important to note that, again with few exceptions, the basic unities, as they had grown up, were largely observed. And with the unities, the bien-séances, too. We noticed that even Scudéry's Le Prince déguisé, in pre-Cid days, was relatively faithful to both sets of restrictions - if "restrictions" is the word - and Thomas Corneille's Timocrate, again despite obvious difficulties arising from the subject-matter, observes the unities fairly well. This feature, along with the freedom with source-material from which dramatists benefited, means that we can study the dramatic side of the plays with an easier conscience. They may be, they cannot help being, reflections of their time, with literary and social influences and pressures apparent. But as plays, they are what their authors made them. We shall look at the main tragi-comedies from the time of Timocrate up to Thomas Corneille's Antiochus of 1666, which saw virtually the end of the form, starting with those by lesser-known authors and working up to the major figures like Gilbert and Quinault.

Samuel Chappuzeau's Armetzar ou les Amis ennemis (1657) provides a good starting-point, for the subject is reminiscent of Timocrate. Here the Tartar prince Armetzar and the Chinese prince Vanlie, being in love with each other's sister, exchange places, alter their names and ranks and

render signal services to each other's father. Vanlie's sister Ladice repels Armetzar alias Phocate's advances, and Vanlie's step-mother, Zarimène, attempts to promote her own son Artaban's cause. Ladice discovers who "Phocate" is, but the latter, Armetzar, is soon occupied, for his host is defeated by the Tartars and Ladice believes a report that Armetzar has helped his father Tamerlan in the defeat of the Chinese. Shortly afterwards, Armetzar is captured by Tamerlan, and each father, to his surprise, discovers his son in the opposing camp. Artaban is killed in battle, Zarimène dies of grief; Armetzar wins Ladice and Vanlie the former's sister, Hermasie.

As in Timocrate, love is the spring of the action, if not the centre of psychological interest. Indeed, in the dédicace to M. Snoeckaert de Schaunburgh, Chappuzeau insists on the fact that "il est tres rare de voir l'amitié & la haine compatir ensemble, & deux personnes se déclarer la guerre au moment qu'ils se déclarent de l'affection. C'est vne aventure si peu commune, que l'amour seul peut la rendre vraysemblable ... Les plus critiques mêmes ... auoient treuvé l'intrigue hors du commun." And in the furtherance of this affection, Chappuzeau has Armetzar produce a portrait of Ladice (I.5), with the stage-direction "Il tire une boîte de portrait, sans que Vanlie se montre curieux de la voir".

The plot may seem complex, with its disguising of both Armetzar the Tartar and Vanlie, the Chinese king's son, especially when each decides to use the same alias, Phocate!

But in fact this is not so, and some of the dramatic ideas are rather wasted. The Armetzar-Ladice affair dominates the Vanlie-Hermasie one; indeed Hermasie does not appear on stage. Each of the men has pierced the other's disguise by the end of act I; the remaining four acts depend on the demystification of the other characters. Ladice only learns of Armetzar / Phocate's identity in the last scene of act IV, although the prince had said two acts earlier: "Cessons d'être Phocate, & montrons Armetzar". So on the one hand the audience is soon put in the picture concerning the false identities; it is the actors, the minor characters, who are misled. At the same time, further confusion is caused by the belief, fostered by the existence of Vanlie / Phocate, that Armetzar / Phocate has abandoned the Chinese cause: Armetzar tells an angry Ladice in V.4: "Sous le semblable nom, sous des armes pareilles, / Votre frere (Vanlie) a trompé ses yeux & ses oreilles .../ Il assistoit mon pere, & i'assistois le vôtre."

Other details show that, although Armetzar is of the generation of Timocrate, it is a less skilfully constructed, less classical play. The stepmother / stepson episode 10 may induce a thrill, but not much more. Zarimène is as in-vraisemblable as Mélanire, the gardener's wife in Le Prince déguisé (and of lowly estate, too; she is "fille d'un suiet", II.1), and her melodramatic command to Artaban to kill Armetzar / Phocate (III.8) gets her nowhere. There are a number of stage-directions still: "Vanlie commence à parêtrer, précédé de Mennon & autre Suite. Le Roy s'entretient bas un moment avec Artaban, pour donner lieu à la

surprise d'Armetzar & de Vanlie." (I.3); "Après s'être tenu un peu de temps embrassez: les deux confidens en faisant de même de leur côté" (I.5) and so on. Tamerlan only appears in the last two of the thirty-two scenes in the play, and the final one (V.6) lasts for a seventh of the whole play, thirteen pages out of ninety.

With Le Prince corsaire, published posthumously in 1663 but probably performed in 1658, Scarron offers a tragi-comedy which appears simple in construction and with a pirate plot in the same vein as that of Timocrate. Two Cypriot princesses, daughters of the late king Pisandre, are in love with the sons of Nicanor, Pisandre's brother. One of the princes, though, Alcandre, is in the play disguised as Orosmane, a pirate whom he, Alcandre, has in fact killed. Elise, however, believing the supposed Orosmane to have dispatched her beloved, seeks revenge on him through the second prince, Amintas. Twice the pirate is captured: the first time Elise is on the point of killing him when she recognises him as Alcandre. On the second occasion, when Elise is being forced to marry Amintas as Pisandre had ordered before his death if she were to rule over Cyprus, the palace is invaded by pirates and Alcandre is set free. Nicanor is recognised as Alcandre's father, his threat to put Elise to death is lifted, the princess marries Alcandre and her sister wins Amintas.

The play is clearly centred on Elise, who appears in twenty-two of the thirty-three scenes, twice as often as any of the other characters. Orosmane, the title-character,

is present least, in only nine scenes, from the stances of act IV scene 1 onwards. This is presumably due to Scarron's preoccupation with unity of place - the scene is, in fact, limited to the town of Paphos and to Orosmane's prison there -, but in Timocrate Thomas Corneille had managed to introduce his hero into half the scenes, ten times as Cléomène in the first four acts and five times as Timocrate in the last. In other ways, too, the distribution of characters and material is poor. The five scenes of the first act include three with only Elise as the main character; the second act, on the other hand, although short (three scenes) has four of the five main characters in each of the first two scenes and one, Elise's sister Alcione, in the third. Act III, with its eight scenes, is held together largely by Nicanor (scenes 1-5 and 8) and Amintas (scenes 4-8). Both Amintas and Nicanor are absent for two whole acts out of five, and Alcione is only present in seven scenes.

Act I is typical of the mixed quality of Le Prince corsaire. The opening scene, between Orosmane's confidant and the confidante of the two princesses, provides good thumbnail sketches of the characters, but the closing scene of the act (scene 5) is much less successful. After Elise has recounted to Alcione the life-story of Alcandre (41 lines), she ends: "Vous voulez tout scauoir, & ie vous ay tout dit". However, Alcione is not satisfied: "Ie ne vous quitte pas d'vn plus ample récit", and there follow another 45 lines of description and 32 lines of conclusion on what she has said, making a total of 118 lines from

Elise in this scene alone. One is forced to compare this with an account of Orosmane's meeting with Amintas, given in act III to Nicanor by his capitaine des gardes:

Licas : C'est ce qu'en peu de mots ie vais vous declarer.
 Les troupes d'Orosmane en terre descenduës,
 Se sont en diuers corps dans l'Isle répanduës,
 L'on a pris Amatonte, & le plus fort de tous,
 Que les autres suiuront, marche, & vient droit à nous.

Nicanor: C'est assez.

(III.2)

Clearly, disguise has its own problems of presentation; one presumably cannot expect distraught girls like Elise to seize hints such as that dropped by Alcandre's confidant in I.4: "Orosmane n'est pas tout ce qu'il paroist estre, / Et possible le temps le fera mieux connoistre." Yet Scarron is not content with one disguise for Alcandre; even when Elise, in IV.5, has pierced Orosmane's identity, the hero has to change into Amintas' clothes in order to escape from Nicanor (IV.7). In some respects, this type of disguise is less satisfying dramaturgically than when each of two characters operates throughout the play under the other's name and/or in his clothes. Although here it acts as a suitably dramatic conclusion to the fourth act, it is essentially a repeat of the main disguise, and the effect of Nicanor's threat to kill "Orosmane" (whom he has not yet recognised), followed by his threat to put Elise to death, is reduced by Elise's near-miss at stabbing "Orosmane" in act IV, where Scarron combines two moments of tension: a murder attempt, followed immediately by a recognition of identity. This moment shows, however, how the author has tended to distribute his material unevenly throughout the play and has been required to add unnecessary

details in order to keep his fifth act alive.

Minor dramatists like Morel, Boyer and Mlle Desjardins were also active in the field of tragi-comedy over these few years, but their plays, although good in parts, also have grave defects. Morel's Timoclée ou la Générosité d'Alexandre of 1658 is one that dispenses with disguise, as does Desjardins' Le Favory - but neither makes a success of this apparent simplification. The former is a poorly constructed play, in which the heroine, living in Thebes, is loved by no less than four men at once - by Phénix and Prothite, Theban captains, and by the invading Alexander's general Arminthe and a Thracian captain, Trasile. There is some movement in the play, for after two acts Alexander succeeds in capturing the city. But otherwise the action is badly engineered: Alexander appears in only three scenes before act V, as does his general Aminte; Trasile, the villain of the plot, is tipped into a convenient well in act III and battered to death. Thus the main force opposing Thebes is absent from two vital acts (III and IV), and these acts are filled by the heroine's two lovers Phénix and Prothite and by her mother, Théaclée, who is a quite episodic figure in the play, appearing for the first time in IV.3. Most tragi-comedies of the period have stances (Armetzar has some in III.1; Scarron's Le Prince corsaire in the opening scene of act IV); but Timoclée has three passages of stances, two in act III and one in act IV. Although the unities may be kept, liaison des scènes is not observed - not just once, but nine times, in a play with only thirty scenes. This in itself is a comment on

the fragmentary nature of Morel's tragi-comedy, a feature which neither Thomas Corneille in Timocrate nor Scarron in Le Prince déguisé had tolerated in their plays.

Disguise, in the true sense, does not enter, either, into Mlle Desjardins' Le Favori, and the action is thereby simplified. But the penalty paid is a rigidity of structure, apparent in the exactly equal number of scenes in the first four acts (the last act, with eight, has two more) and in the almost mathematically calculated number of appearances of each main character. Moncade, the "favori" of the king of Barcelona, is present in fifteen scenes; Clotaire, the refugee prince, twelve; Lindamire, Moncade's beloved: sixteen; Done Elvire, dame de la cour: sixteen; Léonor, another of the same: fifteen; Dom Alvar, Moncade's friend: sixteen. Moncade, though, is absent from the end of act II until the middle of act V (with the exception of the last scene of act III); Lindamire, with but two appearances in the first twelve scenes, occupies almost all the stage in act III, with two monologues and four dialogues.

The play is really nothing more than a little moral tale, of innocent love (Moncade-Lindamire) endangered by the jealousy of Clotaire and the delight which Done Elvire takes in disturbing the lovers, not for love of Moncade but out of hatred of Lindamire. The action drags accordingly. The king ceases to look on Moncade as a favourite as early as scene 6 of act I, but he is not exiled until II.5. When this is announced, the others take a hurried leave: Clotaire remembers that a friend's quarrel "m'est

depuis un moment venu dans la memoire" (scene 6), while Elvire and Léonor claim it is too hot: "sauvons nous on y cuit". Clotaire is Moncade's rival, but not sufficiently, and Lindamire quickly scorns his affection. The attitude and characterisation are perhaps the most interesting feature of Le Favory: Dom Alvar's description of the king's favours to Moncade in better days recalling in detail the situation of Fouquet and Louis XIV; Done Elvire's desire for love if accompanied by power ("Moy qui cherche par tout la joye & l'allegresse" - IV.1) and her final cry in V.6: "Vive l'amour commode & la bonne amitié"; the king's explanation, in the same scene, that his anger with Moncade was but feigned, for "J'ai juré par les droits du sacré diadème / De montrer si c'est vous ou ma faveur qu'on aime." This pretence could, in surer, more skilful hands, have provided a highly dramatic situation into which the dramatist might weave a number of contrasted and active characters: why, Moncade has started in Timocrate's footsteps, he is "sorty de nos Rois" (I.1), "depuis dix ans l'appuy de cet Estat" and twice saviour of Barcelona!

Boyer's two tragi-comedies Fédéric and Policrite are very different from one another. Parfaict pays the former the backhanded compliment of saying that "on doit la trouver assez passable après la lecture d'Ostorius" (the abbé de Pure's play, performed shortly before)⁴⁸, but there is certainly too much detail in the play. Disguise is not

48. Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. VIII, p. 302.

only present, but important and pushed to the limit of credibility. In order that Yolande, the Sicilian princess, may have a chance to rule that country one day, she has been brought up as a boy and disguised for twenty years. Although *Fédéric* and a couple of the minor characters know of her true identity from early on in the play, the others do not - so while *Fédéric*, amiral de Sicile, can express an old man's love for her, and through that, betray his regal ambitions (II.1), *Valère*, *Fédéric*'s son, cannot reciprocate the love Yolande feels for him and *Camille*, queen of Naples, engaged to Yolande / *Manfrède*, has her work cut out to stimulate the princess's interest. In addition, there is a further relationship, as *Fabrice*, *Fédéric*'s other son, is in love with *Camille*.

The complexity of the material is not only reflected in the number of scenes, thirty-nine, the six monologues and, again, the regularity of appearance of each of the main figures in the drama; the characters themselves have difficulty in keeping track of what is going on. There are several references to time - the twenty years of Yolande's disguise (I.1), her six-year affection for *Valère*, the "six ans entiers d'ennuis, de crainte & de silence" she talks to him about (IV.9) once the mask is off - and also to complexity: *Camille*'s bewildered "Seigneur, dans ce discours ie ne puis rien comprendre", to the person she believes to be called *Manfrède* (I.2), and her words to her confidante when, four acts later, she exclaims (V.2):

Que de trouble, Florise! Vn Roy cesse de l'estre;
On donne vne Bataille; on change ici de Maistre;

Je trouue vne Princesse où i'auois vn Amant;
Vn jour peut-il produire vn si grand changement?

It is perhaps typical of Boyer's Fédéric that a potentially dramatic feature is introduced, then discarded. Marcellin, the disguised princess's confidant, says to Yolande in I.1 before he learns of her identity that when his (Marcellin's) wife was dying, she had been unable to pass on vital news, which "me fit craindre pour vous, mais n'en dit pas assez". No capital is made from this dramatic device, often used elsewhere, for Marcellin is then told by Yolande who she is.

Policrite, performed in 1661 or 1662, is rather different. It is a rustic tragi-comedy, a mixture of pastoral delights and classicism, in both content and especially form. Again we have a princess in disguise, turned into a shepherdess by her father Solon, heir to Athens, in case her excessive beauty led her astray. The play is concerned, though, not with the benefits Policrite can draw from this, but rather with its effect on other characters. For the princess/shepherdess has only had vague rumours about her status from her supposed father ("En des termes confus il vanta ma naissance./ Et m'en a refusé l'entière confidence" - III.1), and she disappears from the action three scenes later, to appear again only in the last act. The remainder of the play turns on a series of misunderstandings, avoidable and unavoidable. For an act or more (II.5 - III.6), the king of Cyprus thinks that Philoxipe loves Aretaphile, whom he himself adores, and Philoxipe, in love with Policrite, does nothing to deny

this. While Cléon, Philoxipe's rival, learns of Policrite's true identity between acts IV and V, Ménandre, Philoxipe's father, is only informed in scene 5 of act V, after he has already told Cléon to abduct Policrite (V.3) in order to prevent his son marrying below his station in life. Philoxipe is the last to be told about the situation (V.7) and, although he does not believe it, he is less worried than his father: "Pourquoy chercher le rang où brille le mérite?"

The title-character appears in only eight scenes out of thirty-six, and is completely absent from half the play. Philoxipe's rôle is larger in the first two acts (ten appearances), but here he is dealing with the king and Cléon, who each look on him as a rival. Cléon, paradoxically, has the largest part in the play and Philoxipe's father Ménandre has as important a rôle as his son in the second half. Doride, the daughter of Policrite's supposed father Cléante, appears in six scenes in the first three acts, but is a superfluous character, and Aretaphile, loved by the king, has as little justification for being present in the play, as distinct from being mentioned as a necessary character. But Boyer succeeds in the difficult task of introducing romanesque elements - pirates, shepherdesses and an Astrée landscape - into a tragi-comedy which is well-structured and coherent. He does so by limiting the romanesque to the first two scenes and the melodrama to the fifth act, where Ménandre darkly plots with Créon to abduct Policrite "dans vn léger Esquif" (scene 3), and by making the fourth act, for all its deficiencies, into the delaying act which is a feature of Racin-

ian tragedy.

Disguise, too, plays an important rôle in Gilbert's tragi-comedy Les Amours d'Angélique et de Médor (1664), but the play draws little benefit or success from it. Médor, a Saracen prince at Charlemagne's court, loves Angélique, who is in turn adored by three young men Roland, Renaud and Roger. The last two are loved by Marphise and Bradamante. Having already saved Angélique from a bear (I.1, where Gilbert launches into rustic descriptions similar to those in Boyer's Policrite), Médor is disguised as a late lamented friend, Arimant, and this incognito carries the play along: Angélique only had "vne confuse image" of her saviour (II.1) and this she reiterates in his presence in IV.4. Médor, for his part, maintains his disguise in order to be able to appear as a vainqueur before Angélique (ibid.).

The main event of the play is a tournament to decide whom the princess will marry, but as Angélique is not allowed to witness this "De peur que ma presence y cause quelque trouble / Et que de mes Amants la fureur se redouble" (V.3), she has to receive a long récit of the events from Alidor, whose account occupies 113 lines in the second last scene of the play. The tragi-comedy is badly constructed: Angélique appears in twenty-one scenes out of twenty-six, including all from III.3 onwards, with a monologue in V.3 and a monologue with stances in V.1; but no other character appears in more than nine. Act II is occupied by conversations between Marphise, Bradamante and a third female character Isabelle, the third act by similar

talk by the three male lovers - but the three women never meet the three men.

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The main author of tragi-comedy of the late 50s / early 60s is Philippe Quinault. We shall be examining Amalasonte in connection with Thomas Corneille's La Mort de l'empereur Commode, and at present we shall restrict ourselves to Le Feint Alcibiade (1658), Le Mariage de Cambise (same year), Stratonice (1660), a play in writing which, as we have seen, Thomas refused to be a rival of Quinault, and Agrippa (1663). Each of these four tragi-comedies has interesting structural points which should be examined.

Le Feint Alcibiade is the least satisfactory of the four from the point of view of construction and, eventually, of dramatic effectiveness. Although the number of scenes is limited, increasing act by act, the exposition is badly handled and acts III and IV show little progress or end in stalemate. The four scenes of the first act have a regularly rising number of main characters (two, three, four and five), but this is achieved at the expense of crude linking: "Je croi le voir parêtre, il faut nous séparer" (scene 1); "La Reine ignore encor ... mais elle vient à nous" (scene 2); "Tout malheureux qu'il est, je croi ... mais le voici" (scene 3). The second act is more successful, being a series of dialogues between Timée, the wife of the king of Sparta, her husband and his sister. Act III, with its five scenes, adds little to the progress of the plot, while

the fourth act, despite its false news of the death of the king's favourite Lisandre, and "Alcibiade's" warning to king Agis of a plot to assassinate him next day in the Senate, ends where act III did, for Lisandre, on his re-appearance, is still wanting to fight "Alcibiade". The result is an overcharging of act V where Timée's advice to "Alcibiade" that he should reveal his identity is ignored until the end, while a little matter of two traitors is cleared up and "Alcibiade" given another chance to appear superhuman before he reveals that he is his own sister Cléone.

The play has two major threads: Lisandre-Alcibiade/Cléone-Léonide (sister of king Agis, in love with Alcibiade but whom the king wishes to have married to Lisandre, who in turn loved Cléone) and Agis-Alcibiade/Cléone-Timée, wife of the king and momentarily in love with Alcibiade too. To this should be added a third, minor relationship, Charilas' jealousy of king Agis, who has all the power, and his crony Mindate's similar feeling, aroused by his own former affection for Timée. These two minor characters serve to get the action going and nothing else, hence the need for a convenient method of disposing of them at the end. For the rest, Timée occupies by far the longest rôle (twenty scenes out of twenty-eight), paradoxically enough, for from II.3 onwards she knows the identity of Cléone and for two full acts does nothing about it. Lisandre is the character most frequently present after her, but the title-figure appears only nine times in the whole play, less even than Agis' chef de la garde Mindate, who

has a minor rôle.

Quinault's Le Mariage de Cambise, performed in the same year as Le Feint Alcibiade, has a more supple structure. The exposition is much more complex, but then the play centres round a double exchange of children in infancy, so that Atosse, daughter of Palmis, is believed to be the sister of Cambise, king of Persia, while Aristonne, Cambise's sister, is taken to be the daughter of Palmis. After act I, the plot is really very simple, being primarily two love affairs prevented by the fear of incest. As in Le Feint Alcibiade, part of the identity mix-up is known to a small number of the characters and to the audience, when in III.1 Palmis reveals to her son Darius that Aristonne is not his sister; this, though, reduces the force of the previous short act II (3 scenes), where Aristonne relates (scene 2) how she had felt more that sisterly affection for her "brother" Darius, and the latter (scene 3) tells her that he has equally strong urges now. Palmis, who has the smallest main part in the tragi-comedy (five scenes) is absent from the stage between III.1 and V.1, but Darius is present in three more scenes in act III, and in all but one of the six in act IV, but it is not until halfway through the latter that he acts on the information he now has, although he does not actually indicate his identity. The initiative in act IV lies with the Persian king Cambise, who announces that he loves Aristonne, unaware that she is his sister, and offers Atosse to Darius, not realising that the two are related.

By the end of act IV, the action has, as so often in a tragi-comedy, reached a point of stalemate. Insufficient characters are aware of the true pattern of relationships, and those who are refuse to act upon it, for one reason or another. The position, to this extent, has hardly changed since act II. Palmis, with a short, if important rôle up to now, has to give an impetus to the dénouement, by telling Aristonne (V.1) that she could marry Darius, as he is not her brother. Yet both women, on the evidence of the previous act, believe Darius to be in love with Atosse, so although Atosse is unwilling to take a new initiative (scene 2), Palmis departs in order to sort things out. The third scene of the last act brings Darius and Aristonne face to face: the latter seems bent on making Darius keep his word to Atosse, and on herself marrying Cambise, so it is not until the last scene of the play that this remarkably short dénouement is completed by the arrival of a letter which makes the situation clear.

Disguise breeds rumour and suspense. Rumour is rife in Le Feint Alcibiade, for Lisandre, believed killed in a boar-hunt, turns up safe and sound in scene 3, saved by "Alcibiade" at the very spot where they had arranged to fight it out between them. In the same act, "Alcibiade" tells Agis of a plot to kill him in the Senate the following day. Earlier, the first act had ended with a rather facile coup de théâtre: Lisandre, whom all expect to come out against "Alcibiade", speaks up for him, while Timée unexpectedly speaks against him. Agis is made to look foolish - but Quinault cannot use the surprise adequately,

for the weak Agis refuses Alcibiade asylum, as was to be expected. The last act of Le Feint Alcibiade introduces another irrelevant moment of tension, called for by Quinault's creation of the parts of Charilas and Mindate. These two figures attempt to assassinate Agis in his "cabinet", but the king is saved by "Alcibiade", who had hidden there. The fifth act already has sufficient elements in it without this, and Alcibiade's true identity is on the point of being revealed.

Le Mariage de Cambise, although simpler than Alcibiade in many ways, has a double disguise. Quinault withholds from Aristonne the information that she and Darius are not related, and for quite a while we do not know who Aristonne is. As early as the last scene of act I, Palmis' confidante has revealed to her that Darius and Aristonne are not brother and sister; the audience and Palmis know what Darius will learn only in act III and Aristonne in act V. Darius, in fact, wishes to pass on the news straight away, but is prevented by the arrival of Prexaspe, an unimportant secondary character (III.2).

Le Mariage is thus a more satisfying tragi-comedy than Le Feint Alcibiade, although it is far from perfect, even only as regards structure: Mégabise, the Persian captain, and Prexaspe, Cambise's favourite, are quite superfluous characters. Stratonice, which appeared two years later, marks a step backwards in structural technique. The plot of the play is simple. Stratonice, daughter of the king of Macedonia, is engaged to Séleucus, king of Syria,

but loves and is loved by Antiochus, the Syrian king's son; Antiochus in turn is engaged to Barsine, niece of the king of Pergamum, but she is in love with Séleucus (for his power) and he, a widower, loves her. It is only Stratonice's pride - a common trait in female characters of the period, both in tragi-comedy and in tragedy - that prevents natural love from overcoming these forced engagements.

The scene-distribution in Stratonice at once brings out the dilemma and shows how little Quinault has progressed from the method employed in tragedies in the 1630s, where characters were divided into two opposing camps and rarely met before the final act, if then. The first act concentrates on Barsine and Séleucus; Stratonice is absent from all six scenes and Antiochus present only in the last two. The second act introduces the rival group: Antiochus (scenes 6 and 7) and Stratonice (scenes 1-6), but Séleucus does not appear and Barsine only once, in the fourth scene. Act III takes us back to Barsine (scenes 3-5) and Séleucus (scenes 1-4); Antiochus is absent and Stratonice only present in the opening scene. Deadlock thus prevails and is seen to prevail until Barsine (III.5) sends a messenger to suggest to Séleucus that Stratonice loves not him but Antiochus. The fourth act sees marginally more contact between the two sides, with a second meeting between Séleucus and Antiochus (IV.2) and two scenes (scenes 3 and 4) between Séleucus and Stratonice. But the action is still deadlocked until act V, where in the last scene Stratonice's uncle Philippe, whom we have only met once before (II.1), arrives like a deus ex machina and insists that his niece

must marry a king. So Séleucus hands over power to his son Antiochus in order to facilitate the marriage, and Barsine has lost her main reason for loving Séleucus.

A word from Antiochus to his father would have solved the whole problem of hindered love, for as early as I.5 the king admits that he himself prefers Barsine to Stratonice. In this respect, the mutual silence, and the feeling of pride in Stratonice herself, fulfil a function similar to disguise in Quinault's other two plays, but less satisfactorily. In Le Feint Alcibiade, Quinault had introduced a character disguised as a member of the opposite sex, as did Boyer with his Yolande/Manfrède in Fédéric. He reduced the impact for the audience and for Timée by having Alcibiade reveal his identity as early as the beginning of the second act, and capitalised on the others' ignorance by having impossible relationships continue after this point, even although Alcibiade drops hints in act III that he may not be what he appears to be. Le Mariage de Cambise goes further still, with an exchange of infants and double confusion of identity, with the correspondingly higher risk of incest⁴⁹. The chink in the armour occurs later in Le Mariage than in Le Feint Alcibiade, for it is act III before Palmis tells Darius who he is (or rather who Aristonne is not), but general ignorance is maintained until well on into the closing act.

49. C. Cherpac's book The call of blood in French classical tragedy, Baltimore, 1958, deals in detail with this important subject.

Finally, Agrippa ou le faux Tibérinus. The improbability of the plot of this tragi-comedy has been remarked on by Lancaster⁵⁰, but given that a young girl such as Lavinie, in love with Agrippa, son of Tirrhène, is unlikely not to recognise him when he appears as Tibérinus, king of Alba, believed to have murdered the said Agrippa, the action is basically similar to that in other plays with false identity. Tirrhène, who witnessed the drowning of the real king and who, because of ambition, maintains the pretence that his son, who luckily has identical features, is Tibérinus, lets the audience know what is what in the last scene of act I. The struggle between "Tibérinus"/Agrippa's love for Lavinie (who despises him as king) and Tirrhène's desire that all should be kept quiet provides a minimum of credibility, and, in Tirrhène, an interestingly unsentimental character, rare in Quinault, but reminiscent of Thomas Corneille's Stilicon, who had appeared on the stage almost three years earlier.

Structurally, the play suffers, as others of Quinault have done, by a rather rigid distribution of characters. Lavinie occupies all but one scene of the first act, and is replaced in act II by Albine, sister of Agrippa mourning his death. After her five scenes here, act III is dominated by Mézence, Tibérinus' nephew and rival of Agrippa for Lavinie's hand. He disappears from the play in IV.1, and Albine only appears in two scenes after act II. Clearly, Quinault's aim was to maintain tension, as there is little

50. History, vol. III, pp. 566-567.

action to speak of, and he succeeds in postponing a meeting between "Tibérinus"/Agrippa and Lavinie until IV.2 by having the princess advised to leave at two previous junctures when the supposed tyrant is about to arrive (end of I.4 and II.3). Indeed, the "faux Tibérinus" has only met his real sister, Albine, once before this in the play, in act II, and each of these scenes adds little to what we learned about the two women's position in their opening dialogue in I.1.

Only the audience, Tirrhène and Agrippa are aware of the true position until IV.2, where Agrippa tells Lavinie in confidence. But, to serve his own purposes and in accordance with what he had said to his son earlier, in I.5, about how "L'Amour est indiscret", Tirrhène refuses to acknowledge "Tibérinus" to be Agrippa, and it is only when, in V.3, "Tibérinus" is believed killed, that Tirrhène can hold back the news no longer: "la voix du sang m'échape, & ne peut plus se taire". Luckily though, the rumour of Agrippa's death was false, and all ends happily, although the title-character needs a 48-line récit in the last act to explain it all.

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Dedicating Timocrate to the duc de Guise, Thomas Corneille writes in the épître: "Je me souviendrai toujours avec admiration de cette merveilleuse vivacité, qui vous fit découvrir d'abord les intérêts les plus cachés de Cléomène, & développer dès ses premiers sentimens le secret d'un noeud qui pendant quatre actes a laissé Timocrate inconnu presque à tout

le monde". Three hundred years later, an English critic will see in Cléomène/Timocrate the precursor of the modern detective novel hero⁵¹, while more soberly Jacques Scherer can write: "C'est ... sur un effet de surprise que compte Thomas Corneille quand il ne révèle à son public l'identité de son héros qu'à la fin du quatrième acte de son Timocrate"⁵². The audience, then, as the dramatist points out, and as the author of La dramaturgie classique en France repeats, is not meant to see through Timocrate's disguise until almost the beginning of the dénouement; and, as we saw in de Pure's La Prétieuse, even a man very close in spirit and in friendly relations to the Corneilles benefited from two visits to the play, the first in order to "me donner vn regal à la Françoise, en me donnant le plaisir d'vne chose nouvelle", while the return visit was intended to "me faire sauourer le plaisir que je n'auois gousté qu'imparfaitement". The disguise is a relatively simple one, involving only one person possessing - and aware of possessing - two identities. From the wide variety of tragi-comedies we have looked at in this chapter, it is clear that mistaken identity, a potentially dramatic device even if handled with little competence, covers a significant number of different situations. The character can know or not know who he is, and the audience may, or may not, be allowed in on the secret before the

51. P.J. Yarrow, "Timocrate, 1656: a note on French classicism", Orpheus, III (1955), pp. 171-182.

52. J. Scherer, La dramaturgie classique en France, p. 81

dénouement. Thirdly, the situation of the secondary characters in the play with regard to the disguised hero is important, as the dramatist can choose to enlighten or not to enlighten them, and if the latter, decide at which stage in the action they shall pierce the disguise.

Mistaken identity, physical disguise, is an extremely important dramaturgical device in most of the plays examined up till now (Morel's Timoclée and Mlle Desjardins' Le Favory are clear exceptions), for, of whatever degree, it is the guiding force behind the dramatic structure and controls most of the plays' other elements. In Le Prince déguisé, for example, Scudéry has chosen a character who, like Timocrate, knows his real identity but acts in the play under a false one, only revealing the truth to the main characters at the very end. As a result, like Thomas' hero, Cléarque/Policandre is an active hero, dominating and directing the action, for he holds the trump card of knowing who he is - a wanted man, like Timocrate - and yet being able to lead his own existence undisturbed. As soon as a character divulges his secret to another, not only does the audience's attitude and interest change; the disguised person's own actions are no longer exclusively his but are controlled, to some extent, by the other's knowledge.

At the other end of the spectrum is the tragi-comedy with a double disguise, where A is B without knowing he is A, and vice versa. Chappuzeau's Armetzar, we saw, was a play in this category, although there both men concerned

are aware of the situation by the end of the first act. Another example, although considerably more tangled and which provides a useful comparison with Timocrate, is the play (again called a tragedy) which Th. Corneille wrote next but one, Bérénice. Although Reynier claims that this new play "n'obtint qu'un demi-succès ... parce que l'intrigue n'en était pas assez compliquée" and Daniel Mornet can hopefully claim that "le ressort essentiel de cette action est le même que celui de la Bérénice de Racine"⁵³, there is no denying that the plot is a complex one, rendered much less forceful than Timocrate's by the existence of two false identities.

Inspired directly by the episode of Sésostris and Timarète in Mlle de Scudéry's Le Grand Cyrus, Thomas' new play goes beyond the romanesque account there, adding a number of chance events to an already complicated situation. The double confusion over identity results, as in many plays of the time, from a substitution of infant children, Atys, the young son of the late king of Phrygia, being brought up by Léarque, now king in his place, and then lost at sea by a subject, Araxe, entrusted with his upbringing, along with the sole means of identification - a box containing his father's portrait. Two simultaneous births, one of them fatal, mean that Léarque's new daughter,

53. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 130; D. Mornet, Jean Racine, Paris, 1943, p. 81. Cf. M. Descotes, Le public de théâtre et son histoire, Paris, 1964, p. 119: "L'intrigue reste, en son fond, de ligne assez simple. Elle est, en tout cas, infiniment plus claire que celle de Timocrate."

given to Araxe, is reared as Araxe's own, and eventually, due to a happy chance, can no longer be traced back to Léarque, while the son born to Araxe dies. On top of this, Cléophis, who had a son, was entrusted with the son of the king of Phrygia, but both children died, whereupon one day, "sur le bord de la mer", Cléophis chanced upon "un Enfant aux flots abandonné" lying in "un esquif qui suivait le debris d'un vaisseau" (V.10).

Now, this child, named Philoxène, who passes for the king of Lydia's son, is, it will transpire, Atys, the late king of Phrygia's son, lost at sea. In the meantime he falls in love with the girl Bérénice, believed to be Araxe's daughter and in fact that of Léarque. Philoxène's hopes of marrying Bérénice are frustrated by the Lydian king, although Anaxaris, the suitor whom the latter proposes for her, would prefer another match, thus leaving Philoxène free to take Bérénice. A further complication arises when it is suggested that Philoxène is not the king of Lydia, but the son of Cléophis, but a letter, happily found, puts paid to Philoxène's hopes by showing that Bérénice is, in fact, the daughter of Léarque, the new king of Phrygia, and not of Araxe, and hence of too high a rank to become Philoxène's wife.

The first mistaken identity problem is now disentangled. Although Anaxaris, attempting to jealously make off with Bérénice, who has turned down his advances, is killed by Philoxène, it is only when Cléophis arrives in the last scene of the play that it is discovered that Philoxène is

neither his own son nor that of the king of Lydia, but Atys, and he has the box and portrait to prove it. Philoxène/Atys, although entitled to the throne of Phrygia, is willing to share it with Léarque, and marries Bérénice.

Even this bare analysis shows clearly how Thomas Corneille's Bérénice differs structurally from Timocrate. Events prior to the beginning of the play are added to Mlle de Scudéry's account, whereas in Timocrate the dramatist had kept fairly close to La Calprenède, at least in the first three acts. Bérénice, too, depends to an exaggerated extent on a whole series of chance events (a shipwreck, an abduction, the recovery of a letter and so on), both to set the story in motion and to effect the dénouement. When compared with even Du Ryer's prose tragicomedy Bérénice, published in 1645, which Th. Corneille may have consulted (although Du Ryer's play precedes Le Grand Cyrus), it is apparent that Thomas' tragedy is far from achieving his predecessor's simplicity of plot and psychological vraisemblance. Both the exposition and the dénouement of Du Ryer's tragedy are clear, well-engineered, dramatic and dependent, not on events, but on characterisation.

On a more general level, what differentiates Timocrate from the early tragicomedy we looked at, Scudéry's Le Prince déguisé, and from others in the 1650s, and what, in conclusion, are Timocrate's own merits and influence? In comparison with Thomas Corneille's play, Le Prince déguisé is slacker in its observance of the unities, less regular, more melodramatic, less credible perhaps, for

with a multiplicity of disguises it is difficult to maintain the illusion. Scudéry introduces a rival love-pattern into his play and on the whole takes longer than Th. Corneille to fill in the background material. Overall, the dramatic structure of Timocrate, including the dénouement, is more tense than that of Le Prince déguisé. Where Scudéry has perhaps the edge on Thomas is in the queen's resolution of the dilemma, for Rosemonde, in an equally difficult situation, is more logical than the queen of Argos, whose hesitations are, in the end, overcome by Nicandre's intervention.

The tragi-comedies written in the ten or so years around 1656 have a number of features common to the majority of them. As in Timocrate, love is the starting-point of the action, as can be seen in Du Ryer's Anaxandre, Boisrobert's Théodore and so on, while occasionally this love element is given a greater emphasis still, as in Montauban's Séleucus. Many of the tragi-comedies deal freely with their sources, if indeed any useful purpose is served in trying to define where the idea for some of them may have originated. If in tragedy it is felt legitimate to alter and add to a given historical situation for the purpose of dramatisation, authors of plays with consistently happy endings - bar the death of the occasional minor villain or hapless character - clearly feel no constraint to accept slavishly the detail in the episodes of a novel or other source. With notable exceptions, among them Anaxandre and Théodore prior to Timocrate and Quinault's Le

Mariage de Cambise after, there is a luxuriance of detail, a web of complications due in part to the desire for a romanesque plot and the introduction of new characters, leading to new love relationships. If the unities (and the bienséances) are largely observed, it is only at times despite, not because of, the amount of matter contained in the play. Conversely, there are clearly superfluous characters, even in a fairly simple play like Le Mariage de Cambise, or in Morel's Timoclée, to take another example.

If, in general terms, the tragi-comedies of the period and other plays deserving that title are variations on a theme, the dramaturgical devices, the skill in construction, the proportion of melodrama and so on become vital differentiating factors. Poor distribution of material and uneven progression can be seen in a number of plays, including Du Ryer's Anaxandre and Scarron's Le Prince corsaire, resulting at times, as in Quinault's Le Mariage de Cambise, in a position of stalemate. Elsewhere, for example in Quinault's Stratonice and Agrippa, the spread of characters is on the other hand too rigid, and in Stratonice the two clearly defined "sides" remind one of some of the tragedies of the late 1630s. The dénouement is often ill-prepared (Anaxandre) and illogical, while the decision which a character makes to speak or remain silent can have an important effect on the rest of the action. In Quinault's Stratonice, for example, Antiochus' silence holds up the solution of the problem in an artificial manner, and is in no way similar, say, to Cammà's silence in Thomas Corneille's 1661 tragedy or Fauste's tactic of refusing to

betray her father in the same author's Maximian (1662), for in both these plays silence allows steps to be taken to prevent disaster; to speak out - or so the characters believe - would be to precipitate disaster. This is not the case in a situation such as that obtaining in Stratonice, where a deus ex machina is required in the last scene to resolve the dilemma. A favourite form of deus ex machina, in tragedy as well as in tragi-comedy, is the popular up-rising; Montauban's Séleucus is a case in point, and Thomas Corneille will still use this, although unnecessarily, as part of the dénouement of his tragedy Maximian.

If evidence of dramatic skill is often lacking, or if a play at times sinks into melodrama, as in Quinault's Le Fantôme amoureux, moments of potential tension can also be wasted. To take but two examples: Chappuzeau fails to make capital out of the stepmother/stepson relationship in his Armetzar and Boyer, in his Fédéric, does not adequately use the information arriving from a person now dead. Most authors of tragi-comedies, though, such as Boisrobert in Cassandre or Montauban in his Le Comte de Hollande, make full use of physical disguise, although in a few plays (Morel's Timoclée and Mlle Desjardins' Le Favory, as we have noted), this is not the case. The benefits to be gained from confusion about physical identity, and the dangers to which this same device can give rise, have been fully dealt with above in discussion of individual plays.

How, then, in conclusion, does Timocrate fit into this pattern, and what importance does this well-known play -

often quoted, frequently misquoted, and, one suspects, little read - have for French drama in the late 1650s and early 1660s, and in particular for Thomas Corneille's own development as a dramatist? An examination of Timocrate and of other plays of its type shows, I believe, that the 1656 "tragedy" is not, as a recent critic puts it, "aujourd'hui à peu près illisible"⁵⁴. The unravelling of the plot, "cet ahurissant imbroglio", is far from being an "entreprise ... fastidieuse"⁵⁵, and is certainly less exhausting than dealing with the convoluted situation in the same author's Bérénice. If, as any audience must, one accepts the initial données - more clear-cut than in many other contemporary plays - , Timocrate can be seen to be an interesting and very skilfully constructed play, arousing and maintaining a high degree of dramatic tension. Like its companions, it deals with noble characters and, as was not always the case, lives are clearly at stake: the queen of Argos has sworn to kill Timocrate and give his captor in marriage to Eriphile.

Love is important throughout, present in Eriphile's stances in III.1 and providing the motivation behind Timocrate's deeds both at the beginning and later on in the play. As he says when still known as Cléomène, he is "moins prisonnier de guerre que d'amour" (IV.4). If Thomas Corneille makes full use of love as a spur to action, he is

54. M. Descotes, op. cit., p. 107.

55. Ibid., pp. 116 and 114.

following the tastes of his time, where préciosité and the salons lay a premium on the analysis of feeling. Some fifteen years after Timocrate, in the summer of 1671, Mme de Sévigné, a fervent admirer of Pierre Corneille's tragedies, can tell her daughter that, from her reading of Cléopâtre, La Calprenède's novel which inspired Timocrate, "Je trouve donc qu'il (the style) est détestable, et je ne laisse pas de m'y prendre comme à de la glu. La beauté des sentiments, la violence des passions, la grandeur des événements, et le succès miraculeux de leur redoutable épée, tout cela m'entraîne comme une petite fille"⁵⁶. An equally famous image exists of the duc de Guise staying up all night and learning the second volume of La Calprenède's Cassandre off by heart, so that he can recite it next day to his lady-love, Mlle de Pons, "sans l'amuser aux paroles de l'auteur"⁵⁷. Even Pierre Corneille, returning to the theatre just over two years after Timocrate, is forced to recognise that romanesque love stories, dominating the salons and the interminable novels, must at least be reflected in drama: "Je reconnus que ... cette éloquente et sérieuse description

56. Mme de Sévigné, letter of 12 July 1671 to Mme de Grignan, in Lettres, ed. Gérard-Gailly, Paris, 1963, vol. I, p. 332. The first two of the four qualities which captivate the indefatigable letter-writer may well be an echo of Racine's famous words ("une action simple, soutenue de la violence des passions, de la beauté des sentiments et de l'élégance de l'expression") in the preface to Bérénice, published four and a half months earlier.

57. Tallemant des Réaux, Historiettes, ed. G. Mongrédien, Paris, 1933, vol. V, p. 226.

de la manière dont ce malheureux prince se crève les yeux... ferait soulever la délicatesse de nos dames, dont le dégoût attire aisément celui du reste de l'auditoire, et qu'enfin l'amour, n'ayant point de part en cette tragédie, elle était dénuée des principaux agréments qui sont en possession de gagner la voix publique. Ces considérations m'ont fait cacher aux yeux un si dangereux spectacle, et introduire l'heureux épisode de Thésée et de Dirce"⁵⁸.

Despite the emphasis on Timocrate is not the shapeless, tangled play that critics talk about. The hero is brought to the forefront, although for most of the time he is known as Cléomène and his other rôle of Timocrate is skilfully suggested by brief récits. Between these two identities the character dominates, which is more than can be said for Bérénice's Philoxène, who is himself unable to fathom the protracted confusion about his identity. The problem of one actor and two identities is solved by the use of reports, the changes of fortune in the battle of act III being dramatically portrayed. It is no slur on Thomas' originality to compare the process to that used in Horace, and we should remember that the aim is different: while Pierre had to keep the unity of place and report events which could not be brought on to the stage, his

58. This version from the 1660 Examen of Oedipe (Writings on the theatre, p. 155) is a slightly condensed form of the passage in the Au Lecteur, published along with the play nineteen months earlier, in March 1659, where Pierre, embellishing his account of Oedipus' gouged-out eyes, adds that not only is love absent from the play, a full woman's rôle is, too.

younger brother has to do both of these things and also maintain the belief that Timocrate and Cléomène are separate beings.

The dénouement, as we saw, is less tidy than it might be, for Nicandre's intervention and the Cretan invasion of Argos are needed finally to save Timocrate's life. Marriage to Eriphile, followed by death, which is the outcome foreseen before this, would have resolved the queen of Argos' dilemma, but also turned the play into a proper tragedy. Yet the final twist does not destroy what Thomas says about vraisemblance in his preface to the play nor what Pierre wrote in the Au Lecteur to Héraclius in 1647. The freedom which poetry enjoys to bypass vraisemblance, wrote the elder brother, cannot be turned into an obligation, "et la vraisemblance n'est qu'une condition nécessaire à la disposition, et non pas au choix du sujet, ni des incidents qui sont appuyés de l'histoire. Tout ce qui entre dans le poème doit être croyable; et il l'est, selon Aristote, par l'un de ces trois moyens, la vérité, la vraisemblance, ou l'opinion commune. J'irai plus outre; ... je ne craindrai point d'avancer que le sujet d'une belle tragédie doit n'être pas vraisemblable"⁵⁹. However improbable the données of the 1656 play, the development of these details, the péripéties of the plot, have followed logically from the initial situation. This is

59. Writings on the theatre, p. 190. Cf. the second Discours of 1660.

surely the ultimate test of a dramatist's skill as a constructor of plays.

Finally, there is the question of disguise. The success of the play, and most of the preceding remarks, depend on Timocrate's two identities, and the tension to which these give rise. It is little wonder that the 1656 and 1657 publics were captivated by the situation which Thomas offered them, and if, as critics have said, the play, although so popular at the time, was not maintained in the répertoire all that long, is it not perhaps because Thomas' plays in the late 50s - Bérénice, Darius in 1658-59, and above all Timocrate - were superseded by tragedies (Stilicon, Camma, Maximian) where physical disguise gives way to disguised feelings.

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Chapter 3

Commode (1657) and Gamma (1661): two ideals of tragedy

Commode (1657) and Camma (1661): two ideals of tragedy.

"Dans la foule de ses ouvrages, Laodice ..., Darius, La Mort d'Annibal, La Mort de Commode ..., Maximian... ne méritent meme pas d'être nommés."

LA HARPE.

The abbé d'Aubignac's ideas on vraisemblance, made public with the Pratique du théâtre in June 1657 (i.e. some weeks after the probable end of Timocrate's initial lengthy success on the stage) no doubt stimulated the reply which Thomas provides in the Au Lecteur when Timocrate is published in February 1658. For d'Aubignac, verisimilitude is necessary in two distinct fields: firstly in what, in chapters 6 and 7 of the opening book of the Pratique, he calls "l'action théâtrale", that is the subject of the play in question, and secondly in the way in which the author approaches his subject - the dramatisation. A necessary and complete link is needed between these two aspects of the dramatist's art, for otherwise vraisemblance is not achieved and the spectator cannot fully identify with what is happening on stage. Further on in his treatise, talking of disguise and recognition, d'Aubignac declares that, "s'il est nécessaire qu'un Acteur soit inconnû aux Spectateurs, même jusqu'à son nom, ou à sa condition, pour leur donner le contentement d'une ingénieuse Reconnoissance, il faut au moins qu'ils sachent que son nom et sa condition ne sont pas connus: que s'il est pris pour autre qu'il n'est pas, il faut considerer s'il est besoin, pour l'intelligence

des Spectateurs, qu'on sçache ses noms, et ses deux conditions, ou seulement celui qu'il porte à faux, et lever toute la confusion qui pourroit rester au Theatre"¹. Plays with romanesque subjects are not automatically banned; but d'Aubignac would wish them to be easily understood by the audience and able to offer "des raisons de vraisemblance". His aim is a radical simplification of the tragi-comedy as it existed at the beginning of the decade.

As if to underline his own position on the matter, as well as to cash in on the success of Timocrate, Thomas Corneille brings out another identity play around the very time of the preface to Timocrate and after the performance of the Roman tragedy La Mort de l'empereur Commode².

Bérénice is, in its turn, followed by Darius, another disguise play where the historical sources (Justin, Diodorus, Plutarch) are supplemented by details drawn from Bérénice itself³. Darius marks an important development from Timocrate and particularly Bérénice, in that the audience is informed of the title-character's true identity as early as the second scene of act II ("J'ose dans Codoman vous montrer Darius"). What, in the meantime, about La Mort

1. D'Aubignac, La Pratique du théâtre, ed. P. Martino, Algiers, 1927, pp. 273-274.

2. For a discussion of these dates, see Chapter I.

3. Lancaster, History, vol. III, pp. 189-190. This parallel with Bérénice, which two earlier critics of Darius had failed to see (M. Goldstein, Darius, Xerxes und Artaxerxes im Drama der neueren Literaturen, Leipzig, 1912 and R. Levy, "The sources of Thomas Corneille's Darius", Romanic Review, XX (1929), pp. 35-41), is taken up and developed by D.A. Collins in his book Thomas Corneille: protean dramatist, The Hague, 1966, pp. 77-82, to which the reader is referred.

de l'empereur Commode, which is almost the first printed, secular tragedy to have appeared in France for four years?

In deciding to write the first Roman tragedy of any importance since Cyrano de Bergerac's La Mort d'Agrippine, performed in 1653, Thomas Corneille turned to the Empire and in particular to the end of the Antonine dynasty which marked its turning-point. This period, at the beginning of the 2nd century A.D., saw the annexation of the west under Trajan, the gradual Romanisation of the provinces and a preponderance of provincially-born emperors who, through the adoption system, succeeded in maintaining an enlightened succession and in establishing the pax romana. It should be noted that peace was only established with difficulty at the beginning of the Christian era: over three centuries, as Duruy notes⁴, thirty-one out of forty-nine Caesars were assassinated. After Augustus, there came the Caligulas and the Neros before the Flavians and, at the close of the first and during the second century, the five good emperors: Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. By his sadism and despotism, the last of the Antonines, Commodus, brings us back to the corrupt tyrants of the 1st century, whose reigns provide the background to one Roman tragedy in six in France between 1635 and 1670. With him begins a series of violent revolutions taking place simultaneously with the rise to power of military emperors.

4. V. Duruy, Histoire des Romains, Paris, 1877-1885, vol. VII, p. 532.

The life and death of the emperor Commodus tempted no other seventeenth-century French dramatist. This monopoly would lead one to suspect that Th. Corneille chose relatively unknown historical subjects, which had not yet been treated by a contemporary. In this he would resemble his better-known brother, whose spirit of independence, as far as subjects go, is no longer questioned by critics⁵. Of Thomas Corneille's six Roman tragedies, only Maximian contains elements directly taken up by earlier dramatists. Whether premeditated or not, this wish by the younger Corneille to avoid the well-beaten tracks led him to study very different periods of Roman history. If we examine his choice of subjects, we can detect a progression from the Empire in the first three tragedies (La Mort de l'empereur Commode, Stilicon, Maximian) to the Republic in the last three (Persée et Démétrius, Laodice, La Mort d'Annibal).

It may be that Thomas first found the subject of Commodus in Coëffeteau's Histoire romaine⁶, where in the twelfth book a fairly full account of the episode is given. Equally, he could have come across it either in Dio Cassius or in Herodian. Dio, writing his Roman history in Greek, provides a very different version from that of Herodian: he

5. Perhaps the most radical point of view on the question, and one which seems to me to go too far, has been expressed by Georges May in his Tragédie cornélienne, tragédie racinienne, Urbana, 1948.
6. N. Coëffeteau, Histoire romaine, contenant tout ce qui s'est passé de plus mémorable depuis le commencement de l'histoire de l'Empire d'Auguste jusqu'à celui de Constantin le Grand, Paris, 1621. I quote from the S. Cramoisy edition, Paris, 1628.

does not mention the tablets on which Commodus inscribed the names of those close to him whom he wished to put to death, and he gives to Laetus, the prefect, and Electus, the cubicularius, a more active, spontaneous part in the struggle against Commodus:

Nam Laetus & Electus, qui ei infensi erant, partim quod versarentur in huiusmodi rebus, partim quod ipsum timerent (quippe minabatur eis quod haec se facere prohiberent) in eum coniurauerunt. Statuerat Commodus vtrumque consulem, Erycium Clarum, & Syssium Flaccum interficere atque ipse Kalendis ex eo loco, in quo gladiatores aluntur, vna & consul & secutor exire. non longe enim a gladiatoribus, ita vt si esset vhus ex eorum numero, praecipuam domum habebat. Idque mihi omnes credent facilius, si intelligant, eum abscisso Colossi capite sui capitis imaginem reposuisse, data ei claua, leoneque aeneo subiecto, vt Herculi similis esset; atque praeter supradicta nomina, ita inscripisse: Primus pugnator inter secutores, qui solus sinistra manu vicit hominum (vt opinor) duodecim millia. His permoti rebus Laetus & Electus, in eum coniurant, communicato cum Marcia consilio. Itaque postremo die anni, quum homines die festo celebrando essent occupati, venenum ei noctu per Marciam dant in carnibus bouinis: quumque non posset interire subito, propter vinum (quod largiter bibere) & balneas, quibus vti abunde semper consueuerat, iamque vomere inciperet, ac suspicatus id quod erat, minaretur; Narcissum athletam ad eum interficiendum mittunt, lauantiemque eius opera suffocant ⁷.

The three conspirators' motive is here less strong than in the two other versions: Laetus and Electus are led to regicide partly because they fear that Commodus wishes to get rid of the two consules designati, while Marcia's rôle is reduced to that of a simple, although very competent executant.

The same Dio Cassius, in the fourteenth chapter of book LXVII of his History, recounts the death of the empe-

7. Dionis Cassii Cocceiani Historiae Romanae libri XLVI, Hanoviae, apud Claudium Marnium, 1606, book LXXII, chapter 18, pp. 827-828.

ror Domitian (the last of the Flavians, who died in 96 A.D.). The details of the account are remarkably close to elements which otherwise can only be found in a mixture of both Herodian's and Coëffeteau's versions. Those who were close to Domitian - including his wife Domitia, the prefect Norbanus and his colleague Petronius Secundus - feared his anger. "Nam & Domitia in odium ei venerat, timebatque ne se interfici iuberet; & ceteri amplius eum carum non habebant, quod iam quibusdam eorum nonnulla crimina inferebantur, quodque caeteri ne idem sibi eveniret, metuebant". The emperor, for his part, took action:

Equidem illud etiam accepi, Domitianum statuisset eos omnes interficere, quod iam ei suspecti forent; atque eorum nomina scripta in tabulis tiliaceis, iisdemque duplicibus, sub pulvinari eius lecti in quo requiescebat abdidisse: quas quum inde nudus & garrulus puer forte dormiente eo accepisset, easque inter diu haberet in manibus, ignorans quid ferret, Domitiam forte occurrisse, quaeque scripta erant, legisse; ac rem omnem illis significauisse. Qua re animaduersa, maturauere insidias: et si ante ad rem gerendam non sunt aggressi, quam successorem imperii confirmassent⁸.

Eventually Domitian was killed off by Stephanus, a freedman, and Parthenius, a chamberlain. Stephanus himself was killed in the process.

The second contemporary account is that of Herodian, whose History of the Roman Empire in eight books covers the period from 180 to 238 A.D. His version of the death of Commodus fits into the end of book I and the beginning of book II. Now, we know that Pierre Corneille had received a complete copy of Herodian and Zosimus on 12 February 1618

8. Ibid., pp. 766, 766-767.

as the 2e prix de versification latine while he was a pupil at the Jesuit College in Rouen⁹, and Thomas, living with his brother until at least 1662, must have had access to this book if he so desired. Herodian pays less attention to small details than does Dio, but the absence of dates and historical exactitude is made up for by the liveliness of his pleasant style.

His account resembles in several respects Dio's account of the death of Domitian and the story of Commodus in Coëffeteau. Chapters 13-15 of book I tell of the emperor's licentiousness, his chariot-driving and fights with wild animals and of his desire to rename the months and change his own name to Hercules. His killing of exotic animals from a terrace above the arena was approved of by the people, but his gladiatorial displays were considered disgraceful. However, Commodus was not to be put off by this:

vniuersis diem concelebrantibus, statuit Commodus non quidem ex imperatoriis (vt mos erat) aedibus, sed ex ipso gladiatorio ludo prodire in publicum, ac pro eleganti vestitu purpuraque imperatoria, procedere armatus, deducente gladiatorum agmine, in conspectum Romani populi.

Neither Marcia, his most esteemed mistress, nor Laetus

9. The Bibliothèque Nationale Notice des objets exposés dans la salle du Parnasse français à l'occasion du second centenaire de la mort de Pierre Corneille, octobre 1884, Paris, 1884, pp. 35-36, suggests that the prize was of book VII of Herodian. But the copy in question, with the award inscription on the first leaf (B.N. Rés. J 3006) is of the complete Herodian and Zosimus texts, Greek with Latin translation in separate columns on each page. The edition is the 1611 octavo one, published in Lyon by A. de Harsy. There are no manuscript comments of any kind on Pierre's copy.

or Electus, when informed of the plan, could persuade him to change his mind. Whereupon,

Quibus Commodus, ira percitus facessere ab se iussis, statim in cubiculum reuersus, vt quemadmodum consueuerat meridiaretur, sumpto in manus libello, quales de philyra tenuissimi atque in vtramque partem replicabiles fiunt, conscribit in eo quoscunque illa nocte interficere destinauerat. Ex quibus prima erat Martia, mox Laetus atque Electus: post hos ingens eorum numerus qui plurimum auctoritatis in senatu obtinebant. Siquidem senes vniversos paternos amicos tollere e medio, ne censura illorum sua interpellarentur flagitia.

The tablet was placed on his couch, where it was found by a boy while Commodus was having a bath. Marcia met the boy and seized the tablet:

Agnita dein Commodi manu, ac legendi cupidine magis illecta, vbi funesta contineri ac se primam peti intellexit, Laetumque & Electum subsequi, tantamque deinceps reliquorum futuram caedem: haec secum ingemiscens consusurrabat, Euge Commode, haecine praemia benevolentiae amorisque sunt? ita scilicet de te merui, quum tam multos annos contumelias ebrietatemque tuam pertuli? sed nequaquam tibi haec ita successerint, viro temulento, aduersus sobriam mulierem.

His dictis, Electum ad se accersit (quem etiam ipsa aliquando per se conuenire, vtpote cubiculi custodem solita, & cum eo quoque stupri habuisse consuetudinem credebatur.

Electus was given the tablet to read, then sent it to Laetus, who hurried back to Marcia. They resolved to act:

Placidum autem est rem veneno agi: quod se facile daturam Martia recepit, quippe solita primum illi miscere atque offerre poculum, vt ab amica porrectum suauius biberetur.

Commodus accordingly drank the poisoned wine and began to vomit:

Caeterum quum multum euomisset, veriti illi ne veneno quoque omni electo colligeret sese, utque vna omnes caedi imperaret, persuaserunt magna mercede Narcisso cuidam, audaci strenuoque adolescenti, vt ipsum in cubiculo strangularet. Hic irrumpens illum & veneno &

erapula languescentem, constricto gutture interficit¹⁰.

Herodian's emperor, then, plans to accompany the gladiators into the arena, but there is no question of getting rid of the consuls, an episode indicated in Coëffetteau but absent from La Mort de l'empereur Commode and from the biography of the emperor in Thomas Corneille's Dictionnaire universel géographique et historique, s.v. Rome¹¹. Marcia's fears, then those of Laetus and Electus, are overcome, and the preparation of the plot is described as in Coëffeteau's work, which here follows Herodian's account very closely.

Coëffeteau tells how Commodus, on the last day of 192 A.D., "estoit delibéré d'entrer sur le theatre en qualité de suivant de gladiateur & de Consul pour en déshonorer la dignité, & là dessus s'estoit encor resolu de faire mourir les deux Consuls Erucius Clarus & Socius Flacco, afin de se faire nommer en leur place". Whereupon, in an attempt to dissuade him, "sa Concubine Marcia qu'il tenoit presque au rang d'une femme legitime, & à qui il avoit fait decerner la plus grande part des honneurs qu'oniferoit aux Impératrices, s'alla ietter à ses pieds, luy remonstra l'indignité de cette action, le conjura de ne souiller point ainsi l'honneur de l'Empire Romain..."¹².

10. Herodiani historiarum libri VIII, Lyon, A. de Harsy, 1611, pp. 46, 47-48, 49, 50, 51.

11. Th. Corneille, Dictionnaire universel géographique et historique, Paris, 1708, vol. III, p. 272.

12. Coëffeteau, Histoire romaine, p. 610.

Laetus and Electus wished to do likewise, but after dismissing them, Commode "prit des tablettes, & y coucha les noms de ceux qu'il vouloit faire depescher la nuit suiuate, & tout à la teste des autres mit Marcia, puis Laetus & Electus, & apres eux vn nombre infiny d'autres personnes signalées qui deuoient mourir". By chance, one of his boys came across the tablets and on leaving the emperor's bedroom was met by Marcia. The death-order "l'effraya, mais ne luy osta pas le iugement, & l'emplit seulement de colere contre Commode, duquel elle ne pouuoit assez blasmer l'ingratitude". Along with the two condemned men she decided to poison Commode after his bath. Having offered him a cup of poisoned wine, she spread the news that he needed some rest. "Craignant que la nature ne reietast & ne repoussast puissamment le poison, & que reuenant en sante il ne les fist tous mourir, à raison dequoy a force d'argent ils persuaderent à vn nommé Narcisse homme fort & robuste, de l'aller estrangler, sous ombre de le vouloir secourir. Cet athlette prenant le marché, & luy serrant le col, l'estouffa entre le vin & le poison ..." ¹³.

Now the source of no other of Thomas' plays can be adequately traced back to the bishop of Marseille's modern historical digest. What is significant, though, is the prestige which this Histoire romaine enjoyed in the seventeenth century. Charles Urbain, in his study on Coëffeteau ¹⁴,

13. Ibid., p. 611.

14. C. Urbain, Nicolas Coëffeteau, dominicain, évêque de Marseille, Paris, 1893, pp. 353-354.

lists the numerous reprints of the work between 1623 and 1680; and Chevreau, in a letter of 1687, tells us that "jusqu'à la fin du siècle, les gentilhommes campagnards avaient dans leur bibliothèque l'Histoire romaine (de Coëffeteau) à côté du Plutarque d'Amyot et des Essais de Montaigne"¹⁵. Pierre Corneille used Coëffeteau in writing Polyeucte and perhaps also Cinna¹⁶, while Vaugelas and La Bruyère quoted him approvingly. We know nothing of Thomas Corneille's library; when he was writing La Mort de l'empereur Commode, he was, however, still living in the rue de la Pie in Rouen, in the "grande maison" alongside the "petite maison" where Pierre resided from 1639, on the death of his father. It is therefore very likely that Thomas was able to consult Pierre's copy of the 1611 Herodian and also a copy of Coëffeteau's work, and that he even took care to do so, for this was his first foray into Roman tragedy. As there is no Examen to the play, only an épître in general, flattering terms addressed to Fouquet, it is difficult to be more precise.

From our study of the historical sources it is possible to conclude that Thomas used mainly either Herodian or Coëffeteau, or perhaps both to some extent, when tackling Commode; it is an account in the Herodian style which he followed, at any rate for his description of the tablets. Dio's life of the emperor Domitian also contains the main

15. Quoted in Urbain, op. cit., p. 281.

16. Corneille, Abrégé du Martyre de Saint-Polyeucte (M.-L., vol. III, p. 478); Urbain, op. cit., p. 280, note 3.

lines of what Thomas Corneille wishes to dramatise, and omits certain elements - Commode's homosexuality, Marcia's concubinage - which, for reasons of bienséances, could not be shown on the seventeenth-century French stage. But in the end, this omission cannot be attributed with any certainty to Dio's influence, as Thomas himself could well have realised that these features were unacceptable. As the dramatist's account of the actual death of Commodus is different from that of Dio, Herodian or Coëffeteau¹⁷, and as he places less emphasis on Commode's former crimes than do the historians, it is very probable that at some stage Thomas Corneille used Dio's account of the death of Domitian. As for Coëffeteau, he adds little to Herodian's version, to which we know Thomas had easy access, and would appear as a possible additional check rather than an original source.

For a play which follows Timocrate and precedes Bérénice probably by only a month or two, La Mort de l'empereur Commode proves that Thomas has the ability to write simply, clearly and dramatically, inventing major episodes as he does so. There are only five main characters - the four of the historical account and Helvie, who, along with

17. From the strictly historical point of view, Dio's version, contemporary with Commodus, is preferable to Herodian's rather fanciful account. See J. Zürcher, "Commodus. Ein Beitrag zur Kritik der Historien Herodians", in Untersuchungen zur römischen Kaisergeschichte, ed. M. Büdinger, Leipzig, 1868, vol. I, pp. 223-263; E. Hohl, "Die Ermordung des Commodus", Philologische Wochenschrift, LII, n° 35-38 (1932), pp. 191-200, and Kaiser Commodus und Herodian, Berlin, 1954.

Marcia, becomes a daughter of Pertinax, who will succeed Commodus on the Imperial throne in 193. Both Marcia and Helvie have confidantes, and each of the women appears in just over half the scenes (seventeen out of thirty-two). But they only meet on four occasions in the first four acts (I.1, III.5, IV.4 and 5): neither is prominent in the second act, where Electus and Laetus occupy the main positions, and while Helvie holds the stage in the fourth act, Marcia takes over at the end of act IV and continues until scene 6 of the last act. The two men, Laetus and Electus, appear slightly less frequently than either Marcia or Helvie; only Electus appears in act III and then only once, in the last scene. In fact, the opening acts of the play present an interesting, symmetrical pattern: Helvie, at the beginning of act I, then with Laetus in I.3, followed by a scene between the three men and a dialogue between Electus and Laetus. The second act is almost parallel: Marcia, then Marcia and Electus, followed by another dialogue between Electus and Laetus and a scene between these two and Commode, which initiates the first major change of direction.

Commode, however, the title-character, is the rarest of the characters: one appearance in each of the first three acts, one in each of the first four scenes of act IV, after an initial attempt to murder him, then a final entry in the middle of the last act, for the purposes of the dénouement. Eight scenes, a quarter of the play - there is nothing uncommon about this in French plays of the time dealing with the death of an illustrious figure (Pompey, Hannibal ...). Yet Commode is, for a large part of the

time in Th. Corneille, the only protagonist, a man deprived of relatives or friends who might help him; for Marcia, despite all her ambition, is not taken in by him. The frères Parfaict, in their criticism of the play, affirm that "à la vérité, on trouve dans cette Tragédie des morceaux dignes de l'auteur de Stilicon, de Camma, d'Ariane, & du Comte d'Essex; mais on n'y remarque pas moins que les personnages sont mal choisis, & peu intéressants. Celui de Commode, qui doit faire tout l'intérêt de la Piece, est manqué totalement"¹⁸. This last remark is not strictly true.

One important change which affects the dramaturgy has already been mentioned: the presence of a second female character. Both Helvie and Marcia are brought close into Commode's circle by virtue of their father Pertinax, and yet each of the women is clearly defined and different. Helvie has a reciprocated love for Laetus, while from the middle of act II onwards the latter is destined by Commode to marry the emperor's sister, thus leaving Helvie free to replace Marcia in the emperor's affections. Marcia, for her part, declares her love for Commode, although she is driven on primarily here by ambition and desire for power. She admits in scene 2 of act II that she is not unmoved by Electus, by love or rather estime for him, and although at the time her other feelings overcome this ("Je sçay que sa vertu voudroit la préférence / Mais Commode Empereur emporte

18. Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, Paris, 1745-1749, vol. VIII, p. 243.

la balance", II.2), both she and we are aware of the two possible outcomes, and to some extent this helps to explain and justify her reactions in act V.

Thomas Corneille's Commode is thus largely, but by no means exclusively, the dealings of lovers and the unfolding of events which condition and alter these relationships. Virtually all this is new, and even Marcia is upgraded from concubine to mistress. But on to this framework, which occupies four acts out of five, is grafted the story of Commode's attempt to dispatch those closest to him: the wax tablets, their discovery, the organisation of a plot to overthrow the emperor, the carrying out of the plot, and finally the two or three scenes which justify the play's title. These two very unequal parts are easy to distinguish, but do have an important element linking them: the character of Helvie, invented by the author not only for dramatic purposes or even to preserve the bienséances (although both of these are part of her function), but in order to engineer the passage from one part of the tragedy (Commode's plans to marry off the four other characters as he saw fit) to the other (the tablettes, the four characters' plot and the Emperor's death). It is important to note that Commode's crimes recounted in history remain undetailed in the play until IV.2, and from this it is clear that it is principally Helvie's assassination attempt before the act opens which, for Thomas Corneille, justifies the preparation of the tablettes.

This dual state raises its own problems, of vraisemblance and of dramatic presentation. How does Thomas

Corneille manage to graft these two fairly similar but distinct episodes together? Is the union of an imagined story with a fairly carefully followed historical account successful? How is each section presented and developed? We shall see, in fact, that the transition from the first to the second part is skilfully prepared, by the introduction of a first assassination attempt on the emperor, carried out by Helvie independently between acts III and IV. What of the initial story and its exposition?

Over the first act and a half, the spectator has each element of the problem presented from one point of view. Each of the characters has the chance to justify himself in our eyes and to bring out the feelings which link him, willingly or by force, to the others. Marcia uses her opening dialogue with Helvie (I.1) to state and justify her position with regard to Commode and her attitude to life in general, while Helvie serves as a foil, presenting a more realistic, less naïve view of the Emperor and his lack of scruples. This presentation of the women's point of view is continued in two ways. Firstly, by Marcia's re-appearance in II.1, where she confirms to her confidante Lucie what she has already told Helvie. This serves to show the audience that Marcia is much more concerned about the position she hopes to hold than about the person who will help her to attain it. Behind the carefree façade lie doubts about Commode's integrity, the future of her own ambitions, and her real feelings for Electus, despite the social differences between them. Secondly, after Marcia's departure in act I, Helvie has a

scene with her confidante, then an interview with Laetus, both of which confirm Helvie's deep, if hesitant love for the young man, who reciprocates it. Already, before Commode's entry, a first obstacle is raised: Laetus has been told to marry the Emperor's sister, and his pledge to refuse the command completes what is a threefold picture of the Emperor prior to his arrival. Marcia, Helvie and Laetus have each given a view of different aspects of Commode, who now appears.

It is a common and effective dramatic device to present a character in his absence and then show a rather different, usually milder side to him when he comes on stage. The first of Commode's three appearances before Helvie's assassination attempt portrays him as willing - or apparently willing - to listen to Rome's requests, transmitted through Electus, that he should abandon gladiatorial contests, and to share his power by marrying Marcia, although an ambiguity is left here ("Au sang de Pertinax rendons enfin justice / ... / Faisons-luy partager le pouvoir absolu", I.4) which will account for his switch to Helvie in the next act. The despair of Electus and Laetus (I.5), especially the latter, is thus largely a continuation of attitudes previously adopted - Laetus in I.3, Electus prior to the first act - rather than a direct outcome of Commode's words, and Electus' meeting with Marcia in II.2, with its confirmation of mutual affection, pushes Electus into his second suicide threat, mirroring those of Laetus in the first act.

The re-entry of Commode in II.4 and his plan to marry

Helvie mark the first major péripétie of the play and the end of the exposition. Marcia and Helvie are at that point shown to be occupying widely different positions, although Marcia's is less intransigent than she would have us believe. And while Laetus' attitude is substantially that of Helvie, whereas Electus is more favourable to the emperor, as later scenes will show, the two men are in largely analogous situations. Neither can marry the woman he loves, although Laetus' status is about to rise with his marriage to Commode's sister; Electus simply loses Marcia to the emperor. Of all the emperor's opponents, Helvie is the most vociferous, and it is appropriate that once his plans for her are made clear in act II, she should occupy the stage almost continuously for the next two acts, dismissing the captain of the guards, Commode's emissary (III.1), then Commode himself (scene 2), arousing Marcia's jealousy (scenes 6 and 7), and seeking to save an otherwise impossible situation by an attempt on the emperor's life.

Had Thomas Corneille so wished, the play could have ended fairly rapidly, with action taken against Helvie and plans forced through to deal with the other characters. But as we have seen, the dramatist has both reduced Commode's appearances to a minimum, and in them outlined a character different from the historical Commodus. In the opening scene of act IV, he is still willing to forgive and forget; he rightly talks of "mon ame irresoluë", and Thomas requires to bring Helvie back to confront Commode during the next three scenes (2-4), mocking and

taunting him and deriding Laetus, who tries to take some of the blame (IV.3). It is only in scene 4 that Commode's scorn is fully roused and his departure is marked by ambiguous statements regarding first Helvie and Laetus ("Ils veulent estre unis, il faut y consentir"), then Marcia, for "vous serez hors d'etat de vous plaindre de moy" (IV.4). It requires a relative outsider, Electus, whom Marcia had already dismissed as ineffective at the close of act III, to come, in the corresponding scene of the fourth, and warn her of the general danger to the family incurred by Helvie's refusal.

Helvie's intervention in the early part of act IV has thus carried the action forward to the end of that act; but whether the situation after the assassination attempt has radically changed from what it was before, in the first three acts, it is difficult to say, at least as far as Marcia, Laetus and Electus are concerned. To some extent act IV has been an act of rest, giving occasion for deeper characterisation (Commode, Laetus and Helvie) but not noticeably furthering the dramatic action. Some new péripétie is required to untie the knot, and this is provided by the discovery of the tablettes during the interval following act IV. After this, events take their course, although, as we shall see, not strictly in accordance with any historical account.

General criticism of the structure of La Mort de l'empereur Commode must take into account its division into two parts, a division which, as we have seen, is minimised by the presence of all the characters in each. Plays on

the death of an historical character present problems; by the late 1650s the crisis or death had to come late in the play and the dramatist is faced with selecting preceding events to fill the opening acts. The life of Commodus raised particular questions concerning the bienséances, although it is obviously difficult to say whether Th. Corneille had to provide four acts which are for the most part unhistorical, solely in order to omit unacceptable episodes in the emperor's life, or whether the relationships between the two women and the three men were due partly to this but also largely to fit in with current demands for drama centred round a love-plot. The latter interpretation would seem to be the correct one, although it is difficult to prove the former incorrect. Whatever the slant he gave to the play, Thomas Corneille would have had to widen the perspective and probably introduce extra characters, minor historical or else completely invented ones.

Given the dual interest of the tragedy, its structure is quite competently handled. The exposition is concise and the remaining parts are also dealt with expeditiously. The play is one of action and concerted effort, with stichomythia (III.5) but no stances and only one monologue. The péripéties are introduced regularly - in the middle of act II, at the end of acts III and IV. From the first of these onwards, all the characters, and the action, are dependent on the whims of Commode. The noeud to the first part is continued until well on into act IV, and the dénouement to the play, although relying on an event occurring after the

end of that act, is relevant to all that has gone before. A balance, initially maintained, is altered by the end. At the start, Commode and Marcia are relatively close emotionally, and are opposed by Helvie and Laetus, while Electus in the centre maintains a position of deference to Commode, for "De tout ce que je suis son bras est le soutien" (III.6). Gradually Marcia moves over to join her sister, and Electus is fully convinced of the imminent danger by the end of act IV¹⁹. Thomas Corneille has also taken care to develop his characters as far as his material will allow. Commode's death, recounted in V.7, could well have provided a fitting climax, accompanied by a quick summary of the other characters' reactions; but Thomas, like the historians, looks forward to the succession, and Marcia learns (scene 8) that her father Pertinax has already been chosen. The final scene 9 contains details of the forthcoming marriages between Helvie and Laetus and Marcia and Electus.

Thomas Corneille has been criticised, in general terms, for relegating essential information to the intervals of his plays, instead of showing it in front of the audience. Now in Commode, the last two of the four intervals contain episodes which have a bearing on the continuation of the plot: Helvie's attempt to assassinate the

19. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 151 and subsequently Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 193, have compared Helvie to the Emilie of Cinna and consider her inferior to P. Corneille's heroine. The comparison is hardly a valid one, for the initial situations are not similar and unlike the conspirator's wife-to-be, Helvie does not accept clemency. In her case, there is a direct confrontation with Commode (IV.2 and 3).

emperor (III-IV) and the discovery of the tablets thanks to the defection of Flavian, Commode's capitaine des gardes (IV-V). Before one criticises this method, one must ask if there is a more suitable means of conveying these events, and whether Thomas' presentation is to the detriment of the drama.

The interval is an important part of seventeenth-century French tragedy and, as Jacques Scherer has shown, provides a natural and infinitely extendable break in the performed action²⁰. It may contain events which cannot be depicted on stage, either because of the audience's sensibility (or perhaps merely the author's belief that this sensibility would be affected) or because time does not allow for their actual representation. Events in both these categories can, of course, take place off-stage during the course of an act. But whichever method is used, some of the characters, and the audience, will require to be informed about what has happened. Now if the events are as momentous as those in Commode, the news will have to be quickly given, and écits, however concise, are not always the most effective or dramatic means of conveying information. Sometimes they can be, as in Horace, with its eye-witness reports of changing fortunes, or in Phèdre, with Thérémène's account of the death of Hippolyte which is there more to help Thésée come to a realisation of his guilt than to fill in the picturesque, if tragic, scene among the rocks.

20. J. Scherer, La dramaturgie classique en France, Paris, 1950, pp. 119-120.

Neither of the scenes consigned to the intervals could really, or need, be shown on stage; and faced with the choice of placing them between the acts or during them but off-stage, Thomas Corneille has surely chosen by far the wiser course. For this method allows the following acts (IV and V) to open with principal characters involved - Commode and Marcia respectively - commenting, naturally and fully, on the act revealed, and showing their reactions and immediate plans. Both of these first scenes are highly dramatic, more truly so than would be a messenger's recit or even the particular action represented on stage.

Thomas Corneille has decided to make several notable changes to received historical facts concerning Commodus and his entourage. His Commode, rather than being "manqué totalement", as the Parfaict account has it, is a different character from Herodian's or Coëffeteau's, or from Dio's Domitian: less licentious, clearly, and also a little more subtle, in a brash way, and strong-willed in a crisis. His presence is infrequent, but he is inevitably in the minds of the four other characters throughout the first three acts, for their very life, not to speak of their happiness, depends on him. Hesitant because of his love, and seemingly dependent on Flavian, his capitaine des gardes, who, Livie-fashion, counsels clemency (IV.1), Commode remains lucid until the end and finishes himself off with a dagger when the poison is slow to take effect. The act is one of greater strength than a

critic like de Visé would appear to believe²¹. This dependence of the characters on Commode emphasises the close family group which Thomas has built up: Marcia and Helvie become sisters and they and their respective lovers are drawn into the Imperial circle by the position, off-stage, of a possible successor, Pertinax. Aristotle's recommendations, in the fourteenth chapter of the Poetics, that the best tragic situations are found within the family circle, are complied with as far as the situation will allow. The removal of concubines proves to be a dramatic advantage rather than a hindrance, and Electus is right to argue, in extremis, that Helvie's fate will matter to them all. The historical Marcia was the most favoured of Commodus' concubines, but accounts do not speak of her political ambition; this may have existed, and is here made easier by her new relationship to Commode. Yet this should not be exaggerated. The two only meet twice in Thomas' tragedy (IV.4 and V.4, when the emperor is already dying) and never alone together. Although she handles the poison, she does not administer it herself; as she tells

21. In his Nouvelles nouvelles, Paris, P. Bienfaict, 1663, vol. II, pp. 117-118, Thomas' future collaborator on the Mercure has Clorante criticise Commode's cry to the Gods in act V ("Malgré vous iusqu'au bout ie regleray mon sort, / Et vous dementiray iusqu'au choix de ma mort"), adding "Quoy qu'il dise, ou plutôt, quoy qu'on luy fasse dire, il doit croire, puis qu'il reconnoist des Dieux, que le genre de mort dont il meurt, est celuy dont ils auoient resolu qu'il mourroit, & que s'il a esté empoisonné, c'est que les mesmes Dieux auoient ordonné qu'il le seroit auant que de mourir par le fer, & qu'il ne se tuoit pas malgré eux." De Visé, through Clorante, suggests that Stilicon's claim "Et pour faire un grand crime il faut de la vertu" in the 1660 play of that name, is also less resolute than would appear at first sight.

Commode in V.4: "... A Rome Electus voulant prouver sa foy, / T'a donné le poison qu'il a receu de moy". Perhaps there would have been a potentially dramatic scene here, for as Ernst Hohl points out²², Marcia's handing-over of a cup she had herself poisoned would have been "ein dramatischer Höhepunkt, demgegenüber der ungekünstelte Bericht Dios, dem Kaiser sei vergiftetes Rindfleisch vorgesetzt worden, unbedingt den Vorzug verdingt." No doubt Thomas has already adequately emphasised the confrontation between the two people by his insertion of V.4, where Marcia taunts Commode.

If the two women are each given their respective and contrasting characteristics, so are Laetus and Electus. Indeed, the latter, although absent from much of the central part of the play (II.5 to III.5 and IV.1 to IV.5 inclusive), plays an essential rôle. Used as a tool by Marcia in her jealousy, and unheeded when he arrives to give well-founded advice, he becomes, in the end, the chief conspirator, administering the poison and, forgiven by Marcia, awaiting the condemned emperor's arrival (V.2). To this extent, Commode is a tragédie heureuse, for the emperor's death is a relatively glorious one, and each of the other characters has achieved a fair part of what they really, deep down, desire. Bloodshed there may be but, just as Racine, some thirteen years later, will point out that this is not necessary for a play to be a tragedy, so its presence is not always unsatisfying. The distribution of tasks also gives an equal share to each person and underlines the careful mechanics of the construction to which I have already alluded.

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22. E. Hohl, art. cit., p. 196.

As we have seen in another chapter, Camma was a play which, like Stilicon the year before and La Mort d'Annibal eight years later, Thomas Corneille chose to treat in place of Pierre. The source of Thomas' new tragedy, performed at the end of January 1661, has always been taken by critics to be Plutarch; and certainly, both in his Bravery of women and Dialogue on love, Plutarch provides a fairly full account of Camma's marriage to Sinatus, the latter's murder by Sinorix, and the ruse which the widow employs to escape from the murderer's attentions. Thomas Corneille will make changes, as he has done with La Mort de l'empereur Commode and as was commonly accepted practice; but the basic facts are as in Plutarch.

We saw earlier how Fouquet proposed to P. Corneille that he treat Camma for his return to the theatre in 1659, and I suggested that the subject might have come to the surintendant des finances through his possessing a copy of Pierre Le Moyne's Galerie des femmes fortes, the first edition of which appeared in Paris in 1647. It would seem useful to examine and compare these two different versions and see whether Plutarch, famous in France since Amyot's 1559 translation of the Lives, followed thirteen years later by his translation of the Moralia, from which our accounts come, may have offered Thomas details which he could not find in the Jesuit's recent account.

The version in the Bravery of women is much fuller than that given in the Dialogue on love; the latter has perhaps three points of detail not contained in the former,

which in turn offers a wealth of extra material. From the Bravery of women we learn how Camma, conspicuous by her form and beauty, but even more admired for her virtue, modesty, quick-wittedness and high-mindedness, married the tetrarch Sinatus. Sinorix, who was "distantly related" to her husband, falls in love with Camma, but, unable to win her affections by any other means, murders Sinatus. Camma, a priestess of Artemis, and often seen magnificently attired in processions in honour of the goddess, seeks revenge in the temple.

But soon after committing his deed, Sinorix begins to persistently woo Camma, who, it appears, is not unduly downcast by the murder, "ains avec vn courroux couuert en elle mesme, (elle) n'attendoit autre chose que l'occasion de s'en pouuoir venger". Sinorix helpfully tells her his reasons for dispatching her husband and, seemingly convinced by the encouragement of friends, the widow sends for the murderer. When she leads him to the altar, she pours out a libation, drinks part herself and gives the remainder to Sinorix. Only then is her plan revealed: she rejoices that justice has been achieved and, as for Sinorix, "toi le plus meschant homme du monde, donne ordre maintenant que tes amis & parens au lieu de lict nuptial te preparent vne sepulture".

The end is near for both, for the cup was poisoned. But Plutarch, in the Bravery, paints a picturesque scene. Sinorix, he tells us, "monta dessus vn chariot, esperant que l'esbranlement & l'agitation du chariot lui pourroit seruir à faire vomir le poison, mais il en sortit tout

incontinent, & se fit mettre dans vne litiere: & ne sceut si bien faire, que le scir mesme il ne rendist l'ame." Camma lives through that night "and when she learned that he had come to his end", she dies cheerfully²³.

The Dialogue on love version of the story is much briefer. It omits the list of Camma's virtues, although mentioning her beauty, and says nothing about a relationship between Sinorix and Sinatus. In the Dialogue, Plutarch makes Sinorix simply "the most powerful of the Galatians". The Dialogue relates that after Sinatus' death, many princes and kings tried to woo Camma; in Bravery, only Sinorix is involved, and the speed and full explanations which are mentioned there are missing from the Dialogue, which equally says nothing about encouragement from Camma's friends. In the Bravery Camma sends for her husband's murderer; in the Dialogue Sinorix, trusting the widow, comes to the temple where she has sought refuge and asks her to marry him. The longer account suggests that, by poisoning herself and Sinorix, Camma has achieved justice, whereas the Dialogue on love prefers to say that Camma has avenged Sinatus: "I'ay eu l'heur & la grace de venger ta mort sur ce meschant cy", she cries to her dead husband, "estant tres-aise de t'auoir esté compagne en la vie, & de luy (Sinorix) en la mort". The colourful episode of the chariot is omitted from the Dialogue, where a litter suffices, and this version does not indicate

23. Plutarque, OEuvres morales, tr. J. Amyot, Paris, J. Libert, 1616, vol. I, pp. 784, 785.

specifically that Camma knew of Sinorix's death before she herself expired courageously the following day²⁴.

If the Dialogue on love omits much of the detail of the Bravery of women, it adds three points: the supremacy of Sinorix among the Galatians, the arrival of kings and princes after Sinatus' death to seek Camma's hand before Sinorix made his appearance, and the tone of revenge that the widow adopts once she has successfully dispatched her husband's murderer. Each of these could have provided Thomas Corneille with useful additions to the basic Plutarchian source, which must remain the account in the Bravery of women. What, now, about the père Le Moyne's version?

Here again, Thomas could have found two accounts, for the 3½-page story which opens Le Moyne's description of Camma in the first folio edition²⁵ and subsequent ones is followed, after a sonnet, by an Eloge de Camma, after which come a Réflexion morale, a long Question morale and an Exemple. This is, indeed, the pattern for the presentation of the rest of Le Moyne's heroic ladies. The opening account is less factual than the Eloge, more impressionistic, chatty and picturesque, with insistence on the wedding ceremony. As in Plutarch's Dialogue, the vengeance wreaked by Camma is underlined, as is her resultant joy: "Il s'est fait de là sur son visage, vne effusion de

24. Ibid., vol. II, p. 825.

25. This is the edition which Foucquet possessed (cf. MS. B. N. f.fr.9438, f^o50, where the text is, however, dated 1648), and almost certainly the only one that Thomas could have known before writing Camma (Paris, A. de Sommeville, 1647. Privilège 7 August 1646, achevé d'imprimer 8 April 1647). The next edition appeared in Leyden in 1660, published by the Elseviers; but as this, of course, has no privilège or achevé, we cannot know its exact printing-date.

loye accompagnée d'une petite fierté maïestueuse & agre-
able: La colere mesme y a de la bien-seance; & les der-
nieres gouttes de son fiel s'y sont adoucis ... sa mine
est d'une Victorieuse, & dans ses atours il y a de la
feste & du triomfe". Sinorix's reaction is accordingly
more violent: "Et ne pouuant luy faire pis, il la démembre
au moins de ses desirs & de son geste: & fait de son corps,
autant de pieces, qu'il luy fait d'imprecations, & luy dit
d'iniures".

Camma's response is cool, for her joy overcomes her
horror of him. As she collapses into the arms of her
attendants, "elle void dans la fumée des flambeaux éteints
& des cassolettes renuersées, l'Ombre de Sinnate encore
sanglante de sa blessure, qui luy fait signe qu'il est
temps de partir, & qu'elle est attendue en la Region des
Chastes & des Fidelles". Whereupon, "son coeur acheuant
de s'ouurir, elle prend congé de la Deesse; luy demande
pardon de ce qu'en son Temple & au pied de son Autel & de
son Image, elle a sacrifié à l'Amour & à la Vengeance: Et
avec ces dernieres paroles, rend l'Esprit d'un visage
serain"²⁶. Le Moyne does not here concern himself with
what immediately becomes of Sinorix.

The Eloge covers more ground, like the two Plutarchian

26. 1647 Sommaville folio edition, pp. 100-102. Camma had
already appeared four years earlier, in Le Moyne's Pein-
tures morales of 1643, a skeleton version of the Galerie
des femmes fortes, as one of the "six grandes Peintures
des plus celebres et des plus fameux Exemples que cét
Amour (l'amour conjugal) ayt donnez au Monde". She is
there in the company of Orphée pleurant Eurydice, Arté-
mise, Panthée et Abradatas, and Sénèque et Pauline. Cf.
H. Chérot, Etude sur la vie et les oeuvres du P. Le
Moyne (1602-1671), Paris, 1887, p. 154.

narratives, and with greater sobriety than Le Moyne's opening account. Camma, we are told now, "regna par le droit de son sang" as well as by her looks - a detail not insisted upon in the other versions. Her disdainful treatment of Sinorix is again mentioned, and the latter's ambition in killing Sinatus is forcefully underlined: "il assassine Sinnate; & de son corps se fait vn degré à son lit & à son throsne". Her position as a priestess of Diana is not explicitly mentioned in the Eloge, whereas "les Filles de Diane", her attendants, were present in Le Moyne's initial récit. The "ombre de Sinnate" crops up again: "elle n'écouta point l'Ombre sanglante de Sinnate qui l'appelloit; & auant que de le suiure elle voulut le venger".

Le Moyne equally insists now on the widow's intuition and foresight. She sees through Sinorix ("elle ne laissa pas de le voir au trauers de tous ses déguisements & de tous ses artifices") and decides to remain firm: "de peur qu'elle manquast son coup ... elle resserra son dessein dans son coeur avec son dépit". Previous accounts were less explicit. As in Plutarch's Bravery of women, friends here offer Camma advice, which she pretends to accept. At the marriage ceremony, she sprinkles drops of the poisoned potion on the altar before drinking some and giving the remainder to the bridegroom. The deaths are quickly recounted, in a slightly moralising tone; but as in Plutarch, Sinorix dies first and Camma, "aprez auoir iouy deux ou trois heures de sa vangeance, & de la gloire de

sa Fidelité ... alla porter la nouvelle de l'une & de l'autre à Sinnate"²⁷. Le Moyne's account, we note, apart from adding minor details, has compressed the action by reducing Camma's death-agony.

The only other version of the story which Th. Corneille might possibly have read is in Polyænus' Stratagematum, a Latin translation of which appeared in Lyon in 1589²⁸. The account here (pp. 612-614) is very brief and only touches on the main points, with no controversial details. Sinorix and Sinatus are tetrarchs; Camma is beautiful and virtuous and a priestess of Diana. When Sinorix assassinates Sinatus, Camma appears to fall in with his plans, leads him to the altar, drinks a potion and makes him share in it. The only slight change from the four previous versions (two by Plutarch, two by Le Moyne) is that, having given praise, Camma dies, while the bridegroom expires at the same time: "His dictis confestim & ipsa mortem obiit, & sponsus cum ea simul ad aram Deae vitam reliquit" (p. 614). Even Le Moyne's Eloge version of the deaths has been bettered, although Polyænus' may not be the most dramatic.

History, then, provides Thomas with a basic situation and with three characters: the widowed queen, her dead husband and the all-too-present usurper. The point at which the dramatist chooses to begin his story will thus,

27. Ibid., pp. 103-104.

28. Polyænus, Stratagematum libri octo, Lyon, apud Ioan. Tornaesium, 1589.

to some extent, govern the choice of characters for the play and hence the whole conduct of the action. It would have been conceivable for the historical action to have been compressed and for both Sinatus and Sinorix to have appeared in the tragedy, on the lines, say, of Corneille's Sophonisbe, where Syphax and Massinisse are both present but where the death of Sophonisbe is still reached by the end of the play. In this way Thomas Corneille might have succeeded in including only three main figures in his plot, with attendant confidants. If he kept to the historical account, however, and provided for a time-lag between the murder of Sinatus and Sinorix's attempts to find favour with Camma, then the venture became more difficult, and new characters almost certainly had to be found in order to give dramatic form to the struggle between the widow and the would-be king. But this being so, it was up to Thomas Corneille to find persons who could conveniently fit in to the structure and give it the orientation which he thought either history or his own conception of the story required.

Now two other French plays dating from the first half of the seventeenth century treat the theme of Camma: La Caze's Cammane (published in 1641) and Dorothee de Croy's Cinnatus et Camma, a tragi-comedy which only exists in manuscript. Even the La Caze play, as Lancaster states²⁹, was almost certainly unknown to Thomas Corneille, but it is

29. History, vol. III, p. 440. The play is in the B.N., Rés. p. Yf. 428.

useful to indicate its main features and additions if we are to appreciate Thomas' problem fully. Unlike the historical Camma, La Caze's widow is unsure of who her husband's murderer is. She suspects Sinorix (I.1) but does not have conclusive proof, as Sinate had expired after saying only that his assailant was "Sino", and Cammane's own sister, who appears in the first act and again in the closing two, is conveniently called Sinope. The ensuing doubt is a well-worn dramatic device. The play is, then, largely an attempt at identification, aided and abetted by Sinorix, by his brother Cléomène and by Ménandre, who are all in love with Camma. To help solve the problem, Camma offers to marry whichever of the three will reveal the identity of the murderer. Eventually her choice is centred on Sinorix, whom she attempts to stab. Whereas in Thomas Corneille's version she is prevented by another character who will bear the blame, La Caze's widow stops short when the usurper speaks in his sleep. She is spared by a suspicious Sinorix when he misinterprets words of hers as a confession of love. The wedding ceremony, despite the intervention of the brother, takes place as in history, but Sinorix dies on stage, still in the temple, poisoned by Cammane, who expires shortly after him.

The change in the historical account through Camma's ignorance of her husband's murderer is a really major one and, without very strong reasons indeed, Thomas Corneille would not be justified in following La Caze's tragedy here. The first assassination attempt, though, has dramatic possibilities, and in fact Thomas has a somewhat similar scene,

although another character is involved as well (III.3). Lancaster, however, states³⁰ that "the resemblance between the two incidents is not close enough to prove borrowing". The remaining episodes in *La Caze* are fairly conventional: the struggle in *Ménandre* between love for Cammane and duty to Sinorix, whose secret he feels he must keep (I.6); the corresponding struggle in *Cléomène*, whose love gets the better of his loyalty to the prince (II.8) and the ensuing episodes where Sinorix is forced to treat *Cléomène* as at once brother and treacherous subject (III.1, 5). So Thomas, if he renounces the fun and games of identity, is left with a slim dramatic framework on which to build his own tragedy.

He solved the difficulty of the situation by inventing two new main characters, bringing them closely into Camma's family circle by the creation of a chain of love relationships. First, there is *Hésione*, daughter of *Sinatus* by his first marriage and, we are told in I.1, engaged to *Sinorix* while her father was still alive. Although she appears infrequently in the play - in seven scenes, less than any other character -, she has a key position, for Camma is her stepmother (always an intriguing dramatic situation), while *Sinorix* is now far more interested in the widow than in his fiancée, but still has to contend with the latter. For *Hésione's* feelings are dominated by a desire for vengeance and power, and the

30. History, vol. II, p. 196, note 13.

struggle in her between love and ambition, although an unequal one, will give her character a measure of ambiguity. Between acts III and IV, she refuses to obey Sinorix by marrying Sostrate and thus saving the usurper's presumed assailant, for this would leave her with less opportunity to seize power. And it is power which figures so much in her third and last appearance in the play at the end of act four, for example:

Lors que l'offre d'un Trône a droit de nous flater,
Quels qu'en soient les degrez, il est beau d'y monter.
C'est par là qu'on s'assure une illustre mémoire (IV.5)

Yet in her first two appearances (I.5-6 and II.1; III.4-5), it is clear that she believes Sostrate loves her; it is on this basis that she gives her command at the close of the first act and believes, after the abortive assassination attempt, that he has acted on her behalf.

The other character introduced is Sostrate, prince de Galatie and a favourite of Sinatus, whose position at court is even more skilfully engineered. He is loved by Hésione but is himself in love with Camma and thus comes up against Sinorix as a rival, both for the hand of Camma and for power in Galatia (although the latter is not insisted upon in the play). But at the same time, Sostrate plays a key rôle in the work of revenge which occupies a large part of the action. While serving Sinorix, who he acknowledges has been of help to him, he is also called upon, by virtue of his engagement and his love, to answer Hésione's and Camma's cries for help in the overthrowing of the tyrant Sinorix. He thus feels an obligation to all three main characters and can find no satisfaction

in helping any of them.

While the dilemma of being at once loved by Hésione and in love with the widowed queen is a straightforward result of the inclusion of the former character, Thomas Corneille has deepened Sostrate's problem by the debt which he feels he owes to Sinorix. Thus Sostrate is initially in a very similar position to that of Electus in La Mort de l'empereur Commode. There, the conspirator-to-be had, prior to his warnings in act IV, dissociated himself from his friends' hatred of Commode:

Et lors qu'en ma faveur chaque jour il s'explique,
 Pourrois-je prendre part à la haine publique?
 De tout ce que je suis son bras est le soutien,
 Pour elever mon sort il ne reserve rien,
 Et l'oubli qui suivroit tant de marques d'estime
 Des plus noires couleurs peindroit partout mon crime.
 (III.6)

Sostrate's problem at the end of act II of Camma is the same. Hésione and now the widow herself require his help in ridding Galatia of the tyrant, but

Si j'aime Sinorix, il n'est point de bienfaits
 Dont il n'ait jusqu'icy prévenu mes souhaits,
 Ses bontez chaque jour se font pour moy paroistre,
 Je puis ce que je veux, c'est mon Roy, c'est mon Maistre,
 Et si j'ose sur luy porter de lâches coups,
 Me souiller de son sang, suis-je digne de vous? (II.5)

Thomas has seen the problems involved in constructing a five-act tragedy around a struggle for power between Sinorix and Camma, and as in the 1657 play, where love took a relatively unimportant part, so too here: revenge becomes the main motive, presented on different levels by Sinorix, Camma and Hésione but each time involving Sostrate, the character who now appears most frequently.

The third main change introduced by Thomas Corneille

is less drastic than the previous two, but is dependent on them and fulfills the needs both of the play and of the characterisation. Camma makes not one but two separate attempts on Sinorix's life, and it is the first of these, in act III (prepared by her reported acceptance of Sinorix's hand), which provides the basis for the last three acts. Despairing of Sostrate's ability to despatch the tyrant, Camma attempts to stab him but is restrained by Sostrate, who eventually takes the blame for the deed. It is as a result of her growing anxiety about Sostrate's safety that Camma goes through the marriage ceremony and poisons both herself and Sinorix. The first assassination attempt, as we shall see, is a source of dramatic tension and, as has been pointed out, is similar to scenes in previous plays by Quinault and Jean Le Royer de Prade³¹. But its importance goes beyond this and affects the motivation of the characters. It is similar to, but has much greater significance than, Helvie's bid to assassinate Commode in Thomas' previous play.

Other innovations are not so exceptional, but also have a right to be mentioned. Both Sinorix and Camma have attendants, but they do not exceed the limits of the usual seventeenth-century French confidants. To Sosine, Sinorix's capitaine des gardes, is entrusted the recounting of the marriage-ceremony (V.1) and the death of his master (V.6). Hésione, having been introduced, is shown to have stirred

31. Cf., e.g., Lancaster, History, vol. III, pp. 440-441.

up a rebellion, foreseen in IV.6 and whose effects are felt in V.3. This is in accordance with several other tragedies of the time, whose dénouements depended on such external intervention, but the act, although typically defiant, is unnecessary here, for Camma has already poisoned the cup. Yet Thomas uses this apparently superfluous incident as a pretext for Sinorix's departure and it is while he is away off-stage dealing with the uprising that the poison begins to take effect. Finally, it should be noted that Camma has, in the previous scene (V.3), revealed her knowledge of Sinorix's responsibility for the death of her husband, so the usurper dies fully realising the reasons for the act.

The basic historical framework is thus substantially altered, but new characters or events are not added to the detriment of history's account, which is followed in its broad outline. One cannot say, however, that much local colour is present in the play. Sinatus's shade does not come on stage, but Sinorix gives Phédime a full account of its appearance before him in the opening scene of act III and quotes a warning which has so impressed him that he knows it off by heart. Indeed, realisation of what he has done, awareness of the presence of fate, even remorse, are major features of Sinorix's character as depicted in the play. This comes out early on in the action, but is no more clearly seen than immediately after the assassination attempt in act III, when Sinorix, in his first comments contained in a 20-line speech in scene 3, devotes fourteen lines to mention of le Ciel and its influence

and only six to discovering which of those present wielded the dagger. All the remaining characters are necessary in their own way, and, as we have seen, Thomas has taken care to so relate them to each other that, as in Andromaque, with which Camma has been compared³², each incident inevitably affects the other members of the group. From the very beginning, it is clear that revenge - a feature of some, but not all, of the historical accounts - has been chosen as the prime motivating force; the idea is mentioned by Thomas in the Epistre, then eight times in the third scene of act I alone, and love as such is relegated to a secondary position.

By choosing to place his action, as we are told in the opening scene, six months after Sinorix has usurped power, Thomas Corneille is able to limit the extent of his material and, in particular, avoid a lengthy account of past events. The exposition is well handled and by the end of the first act all the main characters have appeared: Sinorix has met Camma, Camma has met Hésione and the latter has encountered Sostrate. The very first scene, a dialogue between the usurper and his confidant, clearly reveals the present positions of Camma, Hésione, Sostrate and Sinorix himself, as well as giving information about the late king. The essential piece of information - know-

32. Lancaster, History, vol. III, pp. 441-442; D. Mornet, Jean Racine, Paris, 1943, pp. 72-73; H.T. Barnwell, "From La Thébaïde to Andromaque", French Studies, V (1951), pp. 30-35; Collins, Thomas Corneille, p. 120.

ledge of how Sinatus died - is regarded in different ways by each character. Phédime reveals in the opening scene that Sinorix has told Sostrate about the poisoning; he believes Camma to be still ignorant of the fact. Yet it is clear from Camma's scene with Phénice that she is quite aware of what happened (I.3). Phénice adds that Hésione, the king's own daughter, does not know the full details; in fact, Hésione, when she appears, is more concerned with Sinorix's abandoning her for Camma than with the royal death. This successive revelation of attitudes makes for a clear and gripping exposition and prepares the audience for a series of tense encounters, with Sinorix unaware that his guilt is known, and Camma striving to keep her self-control in a difficult situation. Indeed, a sample is given in the second scene of the play where, although she calls Sinorix a usurper, a tyrant and a man who uses threats, Camma never charges him with the poisoning.

We saw, in dealing with the additions to the historical accounts, how in effect Thomas has turned Camma's bid to get rid of Sinorix into a two-stage attempt: the abortive stabbing in act III scene 3 and the successful poisoning in the last act. The play thus has two major climaxes, the first bid acting as a corrective to the situation reached at the end of the first two acts and as a form of launching-pad into the second. The turning-point of III.3 is thus an important one, for Sostrate, present in only four of the twelve scenes before the stabbing, moves to the front of the stage - he appears in all but two of the remaining fifteen scenes - and it is in order to solve his

perilous situation that Camma makes her second attempt on Sinorix's life.

A rather similar pattern can be seen in the first two acts of the play. The need to organise resistance to Sinorix constitutes the lower level of the action in Camma; the higher level is that of the unsuccessful and then successful assassination attempts. Thomas Corneille approaches the dramatic problems set by this series of episodes in an intelligent way. Making use of Hésione, whom he has introduced into the court of Galatia, he has her take the first steps when, in the last scene of act I, she makes Sostrate's attempt on Sinorix's life the price of winning her hand:

J'ay receu du Tiran le plus sanglant outrage,
Tu le sçais, je n'ay rien à dire davantage.
Ou du feu qui te brûle écoute moins l'appas,
Ou ne m'offre ton coeur qu'en suite de ton bras (I.5)

It is Hésione, then, not Camma, who initially makes use of Sostrate and places him in the first of many difficult positions. Yet Camma's attitude, as we have remarked, has already been made clear in scene 3 of act I, and her hatred of Sinorix, revealed in no uncertain terms in the previous scene, is shown again in the fourth scene of act II - although in neither does she question the official account about Sinatus' death. Hésione's resistance is thus sandwiched neatly between Camma's interviews with the usurper in I.2 and II.4: following on I.5 and her orders to Sostrate, she meets Sinorix in act II scene 1 and leaves him in little doubt about her feelings. The need for revenge, expressed privately in act I (as perhaps befits an exposition), is now made public by both female characters -

Sostrate is present along with Camma and Sinorix in II.4 - and Camma's ultimatum to Sostrate (II.5) mirrors Hésione's at the end of the first act. The major character (Camma) is thus seen to take final precedence over the minor one (Hésione).

Now the link between the two levels of action is engineered, out of necessity, by Camma who, faced with Sostrate's hesitation (II.5), pretends to accept Sinorix's hand. The news is conveyed to Sostrate during the interval between acts II and III and is then confirmed by Camma herself ("Elle m'a confirmé le rapport de Sostrate" - Sinorix, III.1). The scenes leading up to and immediately following the stabbing attempt are clearly crucial to an understanding of the characters and the play as a whole. It is right that this central act, now that the exposition is visibly complete, should be dominated by Sinorix, who appears in all five scenes. The characters' attitudes to each other have now been made apparent and Thomas is faced with the task of showing Sinorix, for all his blindness - and this itself is dramatic - reacting to the various pieces of information which have come through to him. Above all, the dramatist, having chosen to depict the assassination bid, must so arrange events that scene three neither comes as a complete surprise nor descends into bathos. The demands here are quite different from those in La Mort de l'empereur Commode, for example, where Helvie's attempt - a trial run, too, in many ways - occurred off stage during an interval.

The last scene of act II and the first two of act III thus provide the run-in to the dagger scene; and the main feature here is surely Thomas Corneille's skilful juxtaposition of doubt and confidence. The audience, if not Sinorix himself, having witnessed Camma's determination and bravado in the early part of scene 5, is left at the end of the second act with what seems like her submission. The usurper, in the opening scene of the third, is at once reassured about Camma and troubled by the visions of Sinatus which occur when remorse gets the better of him - and his and our anxiety is heightened by the knowledge that remorse has been with him since the very first scene of the play. The doubts of the opening scene are extended in scene 2, the only monologue of the play, and reach a climax in yet another vision or premonition just prior to Camma's entry:

Mais quoy? d'où tout à coup me vient ce nouveau trouble?
 Mon desordre s'augmente & ma frayeur redouble.
 Est-ce un avis du Ciel qui cherche à m'annoncer
 L'arrest que son courroux s'appreste à prononcer?
 (Sinorix, III.2)

As we have already observed, this vision and the preceding doubts are strong enough to delay Sinorix's normal reaction to the murder bid, and when forced to choose between Camma and Sostrate he has little hesitation in accusing the latter. Scenes 3 to 5 of act III, indeed, are the working out of the closing dialogue of act I (Hésione's commission to Sostrate) and Camma, who had little part there, is equally self-effacing now. Hésione, absent since II.1, comes back with a vengeance in III.4 and 5, after

Sostrate has taken the brunt of the blame, but her intervention, accompanied by Camma's near-silence, only leads Sinorix to order Sostrate to marry the princess and to let him have his decision within the hour. The widow's turn will come during the interval between acts IV and V, at the marriage ceremony which is the logical outcome of the events at the end of act II.

The attempt on his life has galvanised the usurper into some kind of action, but when Hésione, between acts III and IV, refuses to comply with his demands, Sostrate's life is still in danger. The Hésione-Sostrate episode has been neatly compressed into a couple of scenes and an interval, leaving the remainder of the play for the more important rôle of Camma, influenced in turn by the prince's fate. The emphasis is shifted, not just by Hésione's refusal, but by Camma's disclosure to Sinorix (IV.2) that she is loved by Sostrate - the first time that Sinorix has been made aware of this. Predictably the tyrant makes Sostrate's life now depend on Camma's submission ("Et vous pouvez choisir, si ce prix est trop haut,/ De monter sur le Trône, ou luy sur l'échafaut", IV.3). By both of his plans (Hésione's marriage to Sostrate and now Camma's marriage to himself), Sinorix hopes to gain the widow; the order has progressed logically from indirect to direct approach. Yet the initiative, even in act IV, lies with Camma; Sinorix disappears for four scenes (IV.4 to V.1 inclusive). By not having admitted to being the guilty party in III.2, Camma had hoped to save Sostrate, paradoxically,

and in particular further her own revenge. By marrying Sinorix, she will have a chance to kill him - but she does not mention this fact in her conversations with Sostrate in IV.4, joined by Hésione in the following scene. No one is in the know, and it falls to Hésione to predict a mutiny among the people as a solution to the problem.

All points, then, to a clash of intentions at the end of act IV. The noeud has been prepared nicely and the spectator, especially if unaware of all the historical facts, is left wondering whether Hésione's influence is strong enough to affect the course of events. News that she has been imprisoned (V.1), coming so soon after her talk with Sostrate and before final confirmation is given of Camma's marriage, seems to provide the answer. But in two of his Réflexions, Fontenelle, discussing his uncle's play, emphasises the requirements and the difficulties of a dénouement. "Comme la plupart des Sujets sont historiques, he writes, le seul titre des Pièces en apprend le dénouement, & alors il faudroit, s'il étoit possible, prendre une route qui parut ne devoir pas conduire à ce dénouement connu par l'Histoire, & qui y conduisit cependant. Ceux qui scauroient que Camma fit mourir Sinorix, seroient bien éloignés dans le cinquième Acte même de deviner comment le poëte sera parvenu à cet événement, lorsqu'ils verroient le mariage de Camma & de Sinorix terminé, & en ce cas la surprise est encore plus grande, que si on n'avoit pas scû l'Histoire, parce qu'on voit des choses

toutes opposées à ce qu'on attend"³³.

The point which Fontenelle makes is a valid one -- for provided that the spectator only knows the end result (Camma's killing of Sinorix) and not the means used to achieve that end (the marriage ceremony and the poisoned cup), or even if he knows nothing at all about the historical situation, the dramatist can count on an element of surprise even if he keeps close to what history tells him. But in the circumstances, he would have the added advantage of being able to refine on the historical account, altering and adding to its details for his own dramatic purposes. This could not only enhance the interest of the dénouement for the ignorant but also, even if unconsciously, satisfy those who knew the story in detail. Modern criticism perhaps tends to assume too readily that seventeenth-century French audiences knew their classical history backwards, or at least were willing to apply this knowledge when attending the theatre.

Thomas, then, like other dramatists of his time, was probably faced with the problem of catering for a fairly wide range of levels of knowledge when he came to write his dénouement. The historical account is dramatic enough; but, as I remarked at the beginning, he adds an important element in his fifth act, albeit one that fits in perfectly with the previous characterisation of the usurper:

33. Fontenelle, Réflexions sur la poétique, XXIII, in OEuvres, Paris, Brunet, 1742, vol. III, pp. 147-148.

between the poisoning and his death, Camma informs Sinorix that she knows he is guilty of the murder of Sinatus.

Fontenelle again comments aptly: "Un dénouement suspendu jusqu'au bout, & imprévu, est d'un grand prix. Camma, pour sauver la vie à Sostrate qu'elle aime, se resout enfin à épouser Sinorix qu'elle hait, & qu'elle doit haïr. On voit dans le cinquième Acte Camma & Sinorix revenus du Temple où ils ont été mariés, on sait bien que ce ne peut pas là être une fin, on n' imagine point où tout cela aboutira, & d'autant moins que Camma apprend à Sinorix qu'elle sait son plus grand crime, dont il ne le croyoit pas instruite, & que quoiqu'elle l'ait épousé elle n'a rien relâché de sa haine pour lui ... Tout est suspendu avec beaucoup d'Art, jusqu'à ce qu'on apprenne que Sinorix vient de mourir d'un mal dont il a été attaqué subitement, & que Camma déclare à Sostrate qu'elle a empoisonné la coupe nuptiale où elle a bû avec Sinorix, & qu'elle va mourir aussi. Il est rare de trouver un dénouement aussi peu attendu, & en même-tems aussi naturel"³⁴.

By starting scene 1 of the last act with Sosime's account of Hésione's imprisonment, Thomas Corneille is able to give the audience an impression of hopelessness, even before the more expected, if feared, news of Camma's marriage is brought at the end of that scene. A different emotion is aroused when Sinorix learns in scene 2 of Sostrate's love for Camma, and a different one again in V.3,

34. Réflexions, XXII; ibid., pp. 146-147.

where Camma, in a fine interview, accuses the usurper of murdering her husband. The third blow to Sinorix comes with the uprising, recounted in scene 4, and which causes his final exit from the stage. The fifth scene (Sostrate's profession of love for Camma) serves to delay the news and account of Sinorix's death till the closing scene of the play, and it is only in the last few lines of the tragedy, when Camma has learned that her efforts have not been in vain ("Voici pour mes desirs une illustre journée; / Ma vengeance est remplie, & je meurs sans regret") that she announces her own suicide by poisoning.

All in all, little has been added to the historical dénouement, apart from the important third scene of act V. But Hésione's imprisonment (scene 1), followed unexpectedly by the citizens' rebellion (scene 4), serves as a framework for the two vital details that Sinorix must learn of before his death: Sostrate's love for Camma and the reason for the latter's hatred of the usurper. By making use of Sosime to recount Hésione's plight (scene 1) and Sinorix's death (scene 6), Thomas Corneille has succeeded in compressing the extra and the historical events into a short space of time, while maintaining vraisemblance. The last scene in particular, with its 30-line récit of Sinorix's death, Camma's news to Phénice that she, too, has taken poison, the widow's farewell speech to Sostrate and the latter's attempt to commit suicide, provides a fitting climax to a carefully worked-out dénouement.

From what has been said, it is clear that, as most critics have hinted, Camma is a structurally satisfying

play, although this is not to say that the tragedy is without its faults. But these derive more from the quirks of characterisation than from the dramatic effect, although the former are bound to have an effect on the latter. We should now try to gather up the points made in preceding pages and form some final judgements on Camma, starting with the overall structure and character-frequency, passing on to areas such as the end of acts, the intervals and the dénouement before discussing how these ultimately affect the major characters.

I suggested earlier that one could distinguish a useful series of parallels in the play, a balance between Hésione and Camma in particular, which goes further than the structural pattern apparent in La Mort de l'empereur Commode. Hésione, by any reckoning the less important of the two female characters Thomas has chosen to represent, has her say in the first and the third acts (at the close of the act each time), while Camma's turn comes primarily in act II (again at the end) and at the close of act IV and in act V. The two characters run parallel, act in a similar fashion and only differ essentially by the level which each attains in the end. Hésione, claiming vengeance at Sostrate's hand, lives to see Sinorix die and will, one must presume, succeed the usurper on the throne; but Camma, with a similar, if stronger, motive for revenge, succeeds fully in her aim by poisoning Sinorix, even though she, too, has to die in the process.

The stepdaughter's function in the dramatic structure, as Thomas offers us it, thus seems to me to be fully justi-

fied. "Function" is perhaps the right word, for her appearances are few; the three other main characters appear in more than twice as many scenes as she does. Their rôles are of similar importance, although both Camma and Sostrate's appearances are concentrated more in the second than in the first half. It is true that one could imagine the play with Sostrate and without Hésione - a sufficiently dramatic clash would occur were Sostrate and Sinorix to be all-out rivals for Camma's hand, and the widow devotedly attached, like Andromaque, to her late husband's memory. Sostrate could have been condemned without Hésione's intervention (although Sinorix would have had to choose between the prince and Camma as guilty parties), and Camma could have been shown to provoke Sinorix adequately. The end-result of such a three-character play might well have been no simpler than our Camma, and Camma's own rôle would not have had the mirror to it which Hésione provides.

Bearing this in mind, can we really say that Camma, or at least its vital first act, is "occupied with presenting love-complications even more intricate than usual in French classical tragedies"? Does "this complicated state of affairs" extend even to the fifth act, "marred by the especial prominence here of romanesque clichés of thought and conduct"?³⁵ I find this hard to believe, although, as we shall see, the characters' attitudes to each other are not always very helpful. As in so much drama of

35. L. Lockert, Studies in French-classical tragedy, Nashville, 1958, pp. 225-227.

the preceding few years, misunderstandings exist which have an important effect on the action, and hence on the dramaturgy; and in addition relationships arranged against the characters' will or without their permission have to be resolved. Physical disguise, prevalent in tragi-comedy, has given way to a lack of adequate verbal communication. Sinorix, for example, has no time for Hésione, whom Sinatus destined for him, and she has none for him. Both Hésione and Sinorix believe that Sostrate is in love with Hésione, whereas in fact, as the usurper will only learn late on in the play, he loves Camma, who partly returns the interest to achieve her own ends. Sostrate, Hésione and Camma all live under threats, and the pattern of warnings provides Thomas with a further framework on which to construct his play. Until the assassination attempt in act III, Hésione is in danger of being exiled: "Et pour forcer les maux dont mon coeur est atteint,/ Son exil est un ordre où je me vois contraint", Sinorix tells Phédime in I.1. After the first of the two climaxes in the tragedy - Camma's bid to murder Sinorix -, this threat is strengthened; Hésione's exile is replaced by Sostrate's life, and to save it Hésione is first ordered to marry the prince and, when this fails, Camma is commanded to marry the usurper.

Despite the curious atmosphere pervading the court at Galatia, the characters are essentially active, engaged in a form of dialogue. There is only one monologue in the twenty-seven scenes (III.2), that containing Sinorix's justifiable expression of doubts after recounting the

vision of Sinatus. Sostrate, torn between opposing loyalties, has no scene to himself, either at the end of act I or after Camma's request to him in II.5. This last scene ends, not with a hard "either-or" choice, but with an order softened by Camma's statement that she sees she will have to act alone; the agony of indecision has not yet entered Thomas' tragic repertoire. This absence of monologue (or an internal dimension) is made good by the clash of interests among the various characters. It is important that Hésione should be Camma's stepdaughter, not her own child. Hésione and Sinorix, whom Sinatus had destined for each other, meet only three times in the play, first in act II and again in the last two scenes of the third act, and are at daggers drawn; Hésione uses the derogatory tu when addressing the usurper. Such confrontations achieve little but a worsening of relations, already cool, and this is reflected not only on Sostrate but also in the demands made on him by Hésione and Camma.

What of the dramaturgical problems within and between the individual acts? Whatever critics may say, the exposition is clear, brief and to the point, and raises a number of initial problems. In addition to organising his scenes for dramatic effect - we saw examples of this in looking at acts I and V - Thomas Corneille has taken care to create end-of-act tension, in three out of four cases in the form of ultimatums. At the end of the first act, Hésione orders Sostrate to help her in her struggle against Sinorix. At the close of act II it is Camma's turn, followed by the statement that she will give in to Sinorix as Sos-

trate seems unwilling to assist. The end of act III brings the first of Sinorix's two ultimatums: Hésione must marry Sostrate, and when this fails, the second is made to Camma in the middle of the following act. The end of act IV coincides with two events: Hésione's plan to stir up support ("Je vais agir") and Camma's acceptance of her new situation and her project to go ahead with the marriage. It should be noted, though, that this is only felt by the audience in retrospect; Camma does not reveal details of her coming suicide to anyone, not even to her confidante (absent from IV.4 to V.3), and the effect thus achieved is quite different from that in Andromaque, where Hector's widow, often compared to Camma, informs Céphise of her plans in advance (IV.1).

As we saw when discussing La Mort de l'empereur Commode, Thomas has been criticised for consigning important events to the intervals between the acts and to off-stage during the acts, and it was suggested then that this was not the case in more instances than could be easily justified. In Camma, Sinorix dies off-stage, unlike monarchs in tragedies of the 1630s, who littered the stage with their own and their families' corpses. Camma herself is present on stage until her death-agony is well-advanced and Sostrate, in the very closing lines, so a stage direction tells us, is prevented from running himself through with his sword. Certainly, what physical action is shown is both seemly and necessary. The intervals, though, are well used to cover incidents arising from the preceding act and thus allowing the following act to open dramatically.

Between acts II and III Sinorix is told of Camma's unwillingness to marry him and obtains confirmation of this from Camma herself. In the interval following act III, Hésione refuses to marry Sostrate on Sinorix's orders, while in the break between the last two acts Helvie^{Hésione} is arrested and the marriage of Camma to Sinorix is celebrated. Now the incidents in only the last of these three intervals would have presented difficulties of staging; both Camma and Hésione's refusals could have formed the basis of tense, dramatic scenes. But one must bear in mind the context. Had Camma appeared in act III before the dagger scene, the latter's effect would have been lost, to say nothing of Sinorix's moments of helplessness in the first two scenes. Equally, after her scathing remarks to the usurper in III.4 and 5, Hésione could not be brought back in person at the start of act IV without either a lessening of tension or the risk of repetition. In fact she and Sinorix never meet again in the play.

What of the dénouement? Certainly Sostrate presents a problem, but understandably so. Camma is absent in the first two scenes of the final act and in the last four is fully occupied with Sinorix, Sostrate and her own fate. Sinorix, present in three scenes of act V, has his mind fully occupied, too. Hésione does not appear and Phédime, Sinorix's confidant, only once, to bring news of the rebellion. Camma's confidante is present, but only utters one Ah Madame! in the course of four scenes. Sosime has quite a busy time, with his récits in scenes 1 and 6. This then leaves Sostrate, who figures in all the scenes.

Are his remarks to Sinorix in scene 2 (some thirty-eight lines on the recent marriage) and to Camma in scene 5 (forty-nine lines on how she may come to forgive Sinorix, now that she is his wife), are these overdone, an anti-climax, out of character? Having introduced Sostrate, Thomas is bound to work his fate out to a conclusion - Sostrate is the only one of the four main characters who is present on stage and alive at the end, and in the circumstances he cannot help but be the odd man out. Given the chain of relationships, actual, past and supposed, he is affected by the deeds of Camma, Sinorix and Hésione; when the first two of these appear, married, Thomas cannot let Sostrate remain silent. His remarks may be excessive, incoherent in places; but then Hermione, who has suffered less than Sostrate, is far from logical at the end of Andromaque, and one cannot talk of a folie de Sostrate as one can of the folie d'Oreste.

The deaths of Sinorix and Camma are caused by the same wedding cup that the historical sources speak of. Thomas, however, has added an incident interestingly similar to an early scene in his play, for in I.3 Camma recounts how, during her marriage to Sinatus, wine spilled from the cups; this "fatal augure", she adds, "m'annonça dès lors les funestes malheurs / Qui pressent ma vangeance, & font couler mes pleurs". Sinorix dies, not as Sostrate at first hears, at the hands of the mob he has gone out to disperse (V.6) but as a direct result of the poison. The secret he keeps to himself, telling his helpers that "le Ciel" has caught up with him, but prefacing this with the

words

Je meurs, dit-il, je meurs, n'en cherchez point la cause,
Je la sçay, mais bien loin d'en oser murmurer,
Je me trouve en secret contraint de l'adorer. (V.6)

Camma's suicide is as determined as Plutarch and his successors show, and met with the approval of Fontenelle, who listed Camma among those for whom "une mort volontaire ... ne doit pas être contée parmi ces dénouemens malheureux qui renvoyent le Spectateur mécontent"³⁶. With the introduction of Sostrate, the widow's actions are given a new turn, though: while her hatred of Sinorix is evident from her first appearance and again in her interview in act II, the first attempt on his life proves unsuccessful. By waiting for another opportunity, and in the meantime letting Sostrate take the blame, Camma is forced finally to achieve two ends by the poisoning: make amends to Sostrate by guaranteeing his freedom, and assassinate her husband's murderer. Yet it is the notion of revenge that dominates the dénouement as it did the exposition; Camma must wreak personal vengeance, just as later for Hermione it must be Oreste who kills Pyrrhus. When in V.3 Sinorix learns from Camma that she knows of his responsibility for Sinatus' death, he offers to kill himself. But this is not enough for Camma, for "Tu l'offres (ton bras) à l'amour, je la dois (ma vengeance) à la haine". For the act to be complete Camma, too, must die. She proudly says, in her closing lines, that had she wished to survive, she could have arranged for only Sinorix to be poisoned.

36. Fontenelle, Réflexions, LIII; ed. cit., p. 180.

The additional characters are thus a rich source of dramaturgical interest - or seen from the opposite angle, the tension and conflicts of the historical situation are given dramatic expression suitable to a 5-act tragedy in the use Thomas Corneille makes of both Hésione and Sostrate. The action is almost entirely necessary, following on from the initial situation. The only element of chance which enters in is the stabbing attempt in act III - and rather than compare the use of ambiguity here with the several melodramatic scenes in Quinault's Amalasonte (and there is the one obvious parallel, with act IV scene 6 of that play), one should examine the purpose for which Thomas included such an invented episode. Primarily, it is not the act itself he is interested in, but the consequences: Camma's silence and the blaming of Sostrate will allow her time to achieve at least the same, if not a higher goal later. The act is thus comparable to that of Stilicon letting Eucherius be blamed in the play of 1660. Far from detracting from the historical death of Sinorix in act V, act III's bid is necessary to Camma, which is more than can be said of the comparable episode in Quinault.

In the end, it is the villain of the piece, Sinorix, to whom Thomas has given most thought. The dramatic situation of a tyrant being overthrown had been fully explored in Commode; Stilicon, in 1660, had shown a frustrated attempt to gain power and, more importantly, the prickings of conscience in the title-character, when his son is killed in the process. Thomas Corneille's Sinorix is a fascinating mixture of strong desires and illogicality, of

determination and feelings of guilt. Not for him the picturesque chariot departure depicted in Plutarch's Bravery of women. His remorse is apparent from the very first scene of the play and is fed, not just by guilt on the human level but by a belief that fate is dogging him. Thomas has made use, too, of the ombre de Sinate which Le Moyne introduces into his Galerie account - but which Plutarch does not mention -, making the vision appear to the usurper, not to Camma, as had been the case in the Jesuit's version. This dramatic use of a source detail, strategically placed before a monologue which is followed by the first assassination attempt, is fully justified and handled with restraint. Despite his strong guilt complex and sense of fate, however, Sinorix is still determined to obtain Camma, and Thomas uses the two moments of pressure - the order that Hésione marry Sostrate and then the command to Camma herself - to underline his determination. The indirect method, involving the invented characters, is thus a prelude to, but also a strengthening of, the historical episode with Camma, and taken together they perhaps serve to offset what would otherwise be an inconsistency in the character.

Thomas Corneille's tragedy has, as was mentioned earlier in passing, been compared to Andromaque and the latter to another possible "source", Pierre Corneille's Pertharite. The similarities in the three stories are too well known to need repetition here, but perhaps one should point out two or three differences between Andromaque (1667) and Camma (1661). Firstly, the relationship

between Hermione and Pyrrhus is not the same as that existing between Hésione and Sinorix. Hermione loves Pyrrhus, but Hésione has no affection for the usurper in Camma, so the orders which the respective women give to Oreste and to Sostrate are based on different motives. Secondly, the link between Andromaque and Astyanax is of a quite different kind and degree from that which unites Camma and Sostrate. In Racine's play, the strength of the blood-relationship is all-important; Sostrate, on the other hand, is unrelated to Camma, whose only relative in the play, Hésione, is at a significant remove from her. In both of the above cases Andromaque seems much more directly attributable to P. Corneille's tragedy (1652) than to that of his younger brother.

Thirdly, Camma's plan to commit suicide differs from Andromaque's. Hector's widow plans to kill only herself; Pyrrhus, she hopes, will live on and care for Astyanax ("Veille auprès de Pyrrhus; fais-lui garder sa foi", she tells Céphise in IV.1). In fact it is Pyrrhus who, along with Hermione, dies and Andromaque who survives. Camma, on the other hand, wants revenge, the deaths of Sinorix and then herself, and in the end both events occur. Andromaque tells her confidante and hence the audience of her plan; Camma does not. In Andromaque, Pyrrhus is unaware of Andromaque's plans before he dies (for he dies through ^{her}scheming by others); Sinorix, however, is made aware in act V that Camma knows all about his criminal past.

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When taken together, Commode and Camma, two tragedies separated by only four, but four immensely important years, can be seen to follow largely similar means in achieving different ends. In comparing them now and bringing out the changes and the dramaturgical procedures adopted, one could draw a useful parallel with Quinault's Amalasonte, first played in early November 1657, perhaps soon after La Mort de l'empereur Commode. In editions before 1697, Quinault's play is described as a tragi-comedy, and this designation may be more accurate, although blood is spilled. An important point, however, is that Amalasonte could very easily, with a few small changes - and perhaps should - be termed a tragedy. The story of Amalasonte's love for Théodat, his affection for her, the rivalry of Amalfrède, the hatred and cunning of the latter's brother Clodésile and his crony Arsamon, the unrelenting desire to punish of Théodat's father Theudion are well-known; Gros, Buijten-dorp and Lancaster have studied the play, and the first-named in particular has brought out Quinault's cavalier treatment of the historical accounts of Procopius, Cassiodorus and Flavius Blondus, in particular his inversion of the rôles and personalities of the queen and Théodat and the possibility of two love relationships, by making Amalasonte no longer Théodat's cousin and Amalfrède no longer his mother³⁷.

37. E. Gros, Philippe Quinault, sa vie et son oeuvre, Paris, 1926; J.B.A. Buijtendorp, Philippe Quinault, sa vie, ses tragédies et ses tragi-comédies, Amsterdam, 1928; Lancaster, History, vol. III, pp. 148-150.

We have seen how, in both Commode and Camma, Thomas Corneille is also willing to alter and add to history in order to achieve both a viable play and an interesting love-plot. The latter is all important in Quinault's tragi-comedy: if Amalfrède shifts restlessly and quite arbitrarily from affection to hate and back to love, Amalasonte, like Hermione some ten years later, will never cease to love Théodat, despite the suspicions raised in her mind by Amalfrède, Clodésile and Arsamon, and her own blusterings. In comparison with the two women's attempts to conquer Théodat, and Arsamon's barely sketched-in love of Amalfrède, Clodésile's desire to avenge his father's death at the hands of Amalasonte (I.1) are soon forgotten. Both Amalfrède (I.8) and Amalasonte (II.4) declare their interest in the prince - the numerous cliff-hanging péripéties which Quinault engineers during the opening acts cannot remove this feature, particularly clear in Amalasonte's motivation.

Thomas Corneille, in his two plays, is looking for something rather different. Quinault's subject, as the historians present it, offered great potential - the historical Amalasonte was a clever and bold woman, with noble qualities, showing wisdom and justice as a ruler but also negotiating with the emperor Justinian to save her own life, as, for example, Procopius relates. Theodatus, too, while versed in literature and uninterested in war, was fond of money, we are told; and when invited by Amalasuntha to share power with her on the death of her son Atalaric, "quidquid placuit Amalasunthae, iurato promisit, sed malo

animo ac fraudulenter; quippe memor, uti ante ab eo fuisset habitus. Iuravit quoque Amalasuntha Theodato ex animi sui sententia, ac decepta, Regem illum constituit"³⁸. The situation was ripe for a confrontation or indeed series of confrontations on a grand tragic scale; Boileau has not yet cried "Enough" after Attila³⁹ and its Ostrogoths. But Quinault has simply taken over the names, changing the functions of the three main characters drastically, leaving very little local colour (a letter from Justinian, and Clodésile and Arsamon to represent Gothic resistance to Amalasonte) and filling up the five acts with plaintes d'amour or expressions of loyalty interspersed with coups de théâtre.

For Thomas, Commode and Camma presented an equal challenge and one which, on the dramatic plane, has been resolved much more successfully. In the earlier play, the dramatist, while obliged to omit some of Commode's characteristics (principally but not entirely for reasons of bienséances), keeps most of the historical details surrounding the closing actions of the emperor's life and provides not merely history's justification for the assassination, by the insertion of the tablettes incident, but a careful preparation along quite different lines. The

38. Procopii de bello Gotthico, I, 4, in Procopius ex recensione G. Dindorfii, Bonnae, 1833, vol. II, p. 23.

39. This seems to me to be the meaning of the celebrated four lines on Agésilas and Attila (Boileau, Œuvres complètes, ed. F. Escal, Paris, 1966, p. 248). Cf. Satire IX, lines 177-180, ibid., p. 53, and F. Escal's note 25, p. 922, reminding us that Holà meant "Il suffit, arrêtez-vous" in the seventeenth century.

love-plot, very different from Quinault's, summons the characters to action and leaves them receptive to, and prepared for, the bid to murder Commode in the closing act. To this end Helvie is added to the given characters and is made March's sister, thus bringing her into the close family circle, built around the absent Pertinax. (The opposite is really the case in Amalasonte where, to satisfy the pattern of love-relationships, Amalfrède has to lose the tie which historically linked her to Théodat and Amalasonte. Amalfrède's relationship to Clodésile is neither here nor there.)

The Commodus episode offered Thomas four main characters - Marcia, the emperor, Laetus and Electus, and to these is added Helvie. For Camma, the historical story provided fewer figures - only Sinorix and Camma in the front line - so the dramatist was no doubt forced to add two new ones, Hésione and Sostrate, the latter being particularly caught up among the other three figures. Features of the incident in Plutarch or Le Moyne, among them Camma's beauty, are not insisted upon in the 1661 tragedy, and other details are changed. Sinorix is no longer related to Sinatus (cf. Plutarch's Bravery of women) nor does he tell Camma why he murdered her husband (cf. the Bravery again). On the contrary, as perhaps suggested in Le Moyne's Eloge, Camma decides to keep her knowledge about Sinate secret. Both the Dialogue on love and the Jesuit's opening account mention revenge, and this is kept in preference to the Bravery's idea of justice being done. The ombre de Sinate of Le Moyne's two accounts is introduced, but it

appears to Sinorix and not, as had happened at a different point in each of the Le Moyne versions of the story, to Camma herself.

Thomas Corneille, then, adds more than he subtracts, and the inserted characters and incidents are necessary for the historical episode to take on full dramatic form. In both his plays, prior events are rapidly dealt with - especially in Commode - and the new situation is soon established. The exposition in both cases is concise, leaving the new characters, Helvie, Hésione and Sostrate, to make their own positions clear. In the Quinault play the initial situation is more complex, for Amalasonte does not appear until act II and Theudion does not clarify his own position for us until then, as well. But the play has a fine opening scene between the two scheming princes and opposition to Théodat is progressively built up.

It is in the organisation of le noeud, though, that the difference between Amalasonte and its contemporary Commode can be seen, and the distinction is equally valid in the case of Camma. The action of Quinault's tragic-comedy proceeds in a series of forward and backward movements, the characters' feelings changing at the whim of the various péripéties. Theudion's accusations against his son Théodat are rejected by Amalasonte in II.4 and this pardon is emphasised in II.5, when the queen rebuffs Clodésile and Arsamon. But in the following scene the letter which Amalfrède pretends Théodat has sent her throws the queen into a rage and leads into Théodat's monologue

in the last scene of the act. By the opening of the third act, the prince has all against him: the conspirators await the decision of the queen, but then (III.1) decide to go ahead and dispose of him secretly. Amalfrède fears to agree, then thinks of her rival, then has doubts when the death of Théodat is announced. Amalasonte, in her turn, has thought out her position and in III.5 and III.9 re-affirms her love for the man she had so recently dismissed with contempt.

In the face of further hesitation (IV.5) Amalfrède must therefore try yet another ploy, and it is the scene where Théodat appears to be trying to assassinate Amalasonte (IV.6) which persuades Amalasonte to take action. She summons Zénocrate, the expert in poisoned letters, in scene 7 but, once the letter is sent, the queen is again a prey to doubt (V.2), expressing her love clearly in V.5. Indecisiveness has prolonged Amalasonte's struggle between faith in Théodat and love for him and the adverse reports she receives about him from all sides. It is only chance that keeps Théodat alive despite the poisoned letter, yet it is now, when she is powerless to halt the events she has set in motion, that Amalasonte learns from the dying Amalfrède (V.6) that the prince is totally innocent.

Given that Quinault's Amalasonte is supposedly in command, the play's action can only proceed by a series of impulses provided from outside the character. In II.4, her confidence in Théodat is assured, and the conspirators with their various motives, led by Amalfrède, the most mixed-up of all, must find a series of trucs - the anony-

mously addressed letter, the stabbing in the dark passage, the picturesque assassination attempt on the queen herself - to persuade Amalasonte that her beloved is in fact worthy of death. Théodat does not help matters by meekly accepting all the blows that come his way, professing his love and his desire not to cause Amalasonte any trouble ("Vous l'ordonnez, et je vais obeïr", in II.4, is typical of his attitude).

If Amalasonte proceeds in this jerky fashion until enough evidence is piled against the victim to make even the title-character act, Commode and Camma are rather more skilfully constructed in the middle three acts. Both tragedies deal with the removal of tyrants and, as we have seen, Thomas introduces fresh characters into both. In each play the historically attested assassination attempt comes towards the end, during the last interval and act V, but a prior bid is made as well, by Helvie between acts III and IV in Commode and by Camma in the 1661 play, III.3. I mentioned earlier how the new female characters, Helvie and Hésione, form a contrasting force to Marcia and Camma, how their actions are parallel, in a way, to those of the principal women. It is Helvie who tries to kill Commode towards the end of the long first part of that play, and it is principally this unsuccessful act that leads the emperor to draw up the tablettes. Thus Helvie forms a link between parts 1 and 2 of Commode, although the killing of Commode is entrusted to Electus and Marcia. Similarly Hésione is the first to ask Sostrate to kill Sinorix;

Camma's own request only comes in the second act, but it is she, not Hésione, who carries out both attempts, the second being made dependent on the first, for marriage to Sinorix is a result of Camma's letting Sostrate take the blame for the stabbing incident in act III. Camma is thus a better constructed play than Commode: the two parts of the earlier tragedy are fused into one in the later, and attention is more directly concentrated on Camma as she seeks her revenge. Criticisms such as those of F.-J. Tanqueray, to the effect that "Dans Camma, ... Thomas Corneille, au lieu de développer successivement ses deux intrigues..., les traite simultanément, avec beaucoup d'habileté, mais ne réussit pas à les raccorder exactement l'une avec l'autre" and that Hésione's plot is "presque sans rapport avec la première, moins intéressante et pourtant presque aussi longuement développée"⁴⁰, seem quite misplaced. Camma is simpler thereby: the first assassination attempt leads directly to the second, whereas the tablettes intervene in La Mort de l'empereur Commode.

Suspense, too, is better maintained in the 1661 play. The chief contrast in situation, as Fontenelle says, is between the marriage of Camma and the death of Sinorix so soon afterwards, followed by the widow's own suicide. One can also pick out the contrast between the first assassination attempt (known as such to the audience) and Camma's

40. F.-J. Tanqueray, "La technique de la composition dans les tragédies de Corneille et de Racine", Revue des cours et conférences, XLI (n° 12), 30 May 1940, pp. 283-284.

apparent acquiescence in Sinorix's wishes at the end of act IV. Not so in La Mort de l'empereur Commode, for after Helvie's attempt on Commode's life there is barely one act before Electus' warning (IV.6) and immediately after that the discovery of the tablettes and the murder bid.

But for dramatic suspense tout simple one must turn to Amalasonte. First, there are the letters, engineered by Amalfrède, Clodésile and Arsamon: the one from Justinian (I.1), the letter which Théodat intends for Amalasonte and which is intercepted by Amalfrède (I.9) and used for her own ends, and the poisoned letter from Amalasonte to Théodat which kills the over-curious bearer Clodésile (IV.10). Then there are other deeds: the attempted stabbing in the dark "petit degré, qui mène au cabinet" (III.4) and the bid by Amalfrède to blame attempted murder on Théodat in the scene with the sleeping queen (IV.6). Add to this other dramatic moments such as Theudion's announcement of Théodat's imprisonment (I.3), Clodésile's anxious moment when he thinks that the game is up (III.6) and Amalasonte's inner torture in act V, until she knows that Théodat is safe, and it should be obvious that the péripéties form an important part in Amalasonte's effectiveness as a play.

Irony through double-entendre, coups de théâtre depending on the use of generic terms and chance are also features of Quinault's play. Clodésile in I.2 talks to Théodat of "des actions dont vous serez surpris", "votre fortune arrive au dernier terme" and "le bien / De vous mettre en état de ne craindre plus rien", while Amalfrède assures the same

character that "j'en prendrai soin, Seigneur (de la lettre), plus que vous ne pensez" (I.9) and "Oui, j'ai parlé de vous fort long-tems à la Reine" (II.7). Two moments of suspense arise from ambiguous use of generic terms. In III.6, Euric reports that the assassin of le Prince mort is known and will be brought in. Clodésile believes this to be Arsamon, who he thinks helped him to kill Théodat, but it is in fact Théodat who is accused in the very next scene of assassinating prince Arsamon (hence the insistence, in I.1, on the princely status of both the villains and Théodat). A better example of the same ambiguity is the use of le coupable by Theudion in V.3; he knows it is Clodésile, but Amalfrède and Amalasonte believe it to mean Théodat, and the suspense is not lifted until six scenes later, when Théodat arrives.

Thomas Corneille eschewed these devices in Commode and Camma, but a chance happening (the meeting of Camma and Sostrate in III.3) was present in the latter play and some predictably occurred earlier in Amalasonte. Clodésile's death in the very last act depends on his incorrigible inquisitiveness, and Amalfrède's suicide is due to a matter of timing: she takes poison in V.4 and 5, after believing Théodat to have been killed, and the prince's arrival in scene 8 comes seconds after her death. These two incidents raise serious problems concerning the dénouement and indeed the nature of Amalasonte. The play is very close to being a tragedy and would surely truly be so, had Théodat, as we might expect, been killed. As it is, good triumphs

over evil (Arsamon, Clodésile, Amalfrède), and contemporary practice, as we established in an earlier chapter, would consider this sufficient to justify the term tragedy. With the substantial modification of the historical sources, Amalasonte lives on and will marry the man she has just attempted to assassinate - if, that is, her fluctuating fortunes and indecisiveness allow it.

However "neat" the death of Amalfrède, that of Clodésile seems justly deserved and is certainly consistent with his earlier ferocious hounding of Théodat. The dénouements of Thomas' two plays are much closer to history, and necessarily so. Having finally reached the standard view of Commodus in the tablettes episode, for example, the dramatist could hardly let his tyrant survive. The uncustomary "ame irresoluë" of earlier in the play is roused to action by Helvie's scorn and far from succumbing immediately to the poisoned drink, he procures for himself a defiantly personal death. Sinorix, on the other hand, although also depicted with original traits of grief, remorse and a sense of fate, dies as history says he did, but the mort volontaire which Commode achieved is here given to Camma who, dying as Plutarch recounts, affirms that she does so willingly and could have chosen to survive, had she so desired.

Amalasonte is the most surprising of these three plays but not the most truly dramatic. Both Commode and Camma are clearer because more logical, and more closely structured. The Thomas Corneille plays maintain suspense,

but not at the expense of psychological vraisemblance: for they use the intervals to give different levels to the performance, whereas all seems on the surface in Quinault's tragi-comedy. Of the two tragedies, Camma is the more successful dramaturgically, although Commode is not as poor as some critics make out. Both of them give an important rôle to love and the crises of relationship, the jealousies and rivalries which inevitably follow - but these are only means to another end, the overthrow of tyranny. And it is this, in the long run, which is more dramatic than Quinault's insipid love, despite the movement in those forty-eight scenes. If one really cannot agree with Reynier when he says of Camma (not Amalasonte!) that "Dans tout le théâtre du XVII^e siècle il n'y a peut-être pas de tragédie où l'action soit plus vive et plus pressée, où les coups de surprise soient plus nombreux et plus saisissants"⁴¹, one can see in Commode and in its natural successor Camma a mixture of Quinault's art of the dramatic, suspenseful situation but without the tendresse, and Thomas' own sense of the tragic, sketched in in Commode, developed brilliantly in Stilicon (1660) and coming to fruition in Camma the following year.

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41. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, pp. 160-161.

Chapter 4

Studies in conspiracy: Stillicon (1660) and

Maximian (1662)

Studies in conspiracy: Stilicon (1660) and Maximian (1662)

Dutifully if unenthusiastically compiling a chapter entitled "Des tragiques d'un ordre inférieur sous le siècle de Louis XIV" to follow his remarks on Corneille and Racine, La Harpe devotes some fifteen pages or so of his Cours de littérature to comments on Thomas Corneille, mostly Ariane and Le Comte d'Essex. "Camma et Stilicon, he writes, qui eurent du succès pendant long-temps, n'ont d'autre mérite qu'une intrigue assez bien entendue, quoique compliquée. Ce mérite est bien faible quand l'intrigue n'attache que l'esprit et qu'il n'y a rien pour le coeur; et c'est le vice capital de ces deux ouvrages: ils manquent de cet intérêt qui doit toujours animer la tragédie. Il n'y a ni passions, ni mouvemens, ni caracteres; les héros et les scélérats sont également sans physionomie: ils dissertent et ils combinent: voilà tout. Les situations étonnent quelquefois, mais n'attachent pas"¹. The good critic's words about the later of the two tragedies can, on the evidence of the previous chapter, be seen to be largely untrue. What, though, about Stilicon and its later sister-play, Maximian?

In his study on Thomas Corneille, Gustave Reynier airily affirms that "on connaît l'étrange destinée de Stilicon. Redouté des Saxons et des Francs, vainqueur

1. La Harpe, Lycée ou Cours de littérature ancienne et moderne, Paris, Agasse, an VII, vol. V, p. 317.

d'Alaric et de Radagaise, ancien tuteur d'Honorius, devenu son ministre tout-puissant et son beau-père, il se laissa enivrer par toute cette gloire et complota la mort de l'empereur pour mettre sur le trône son propre fils. Sa conspiration fut découverte et on l'égorgea à Ravenne. C'était là une tragédie toute faite, et Thomas Corneille n'a presque rien eu à ajouter à l'histoire"². This statement is manifestly untrue, for even the historian who gives the fullest account of Stilicho's exploits does not endow the character with the host of features of Thomas Corneille's protagonist. In the plays of the younger Corneille which we have already examined, important alterations and additions have been made, and necessarily so, to historical source-material, and it would be surprising if in Stilicon the dramatist were to radically change this habit.

There are three main accounts of Stilicho's life: Claudian's history, which stops short of the soldier's death; Orosius' History against the pagans and the version in Zosimus' Roman history. These are to be filled out with the ecclesiastical histories of Sozomen and Philostorgius.

Claudian spent the ten-year period from 395 to 404 A.D. in Rome and thus witnessed and wrote about the activities of the young emperor Honorius and in particular his leading military commander Stilicho, whose consulship in 400 provides him with material for a panegyric which is also an

2. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 151.

important historical document. Orosius the Spaniard, having fled from the Vandals to Africa in 414, had no love for Stilicho and in his work attributes most of Rome's disasters to the ambition and treachery of the general whose father was a Vandal. His History against the pagans, written at the request of St. Augustine, probably between about 415 and 418, covers the period down to 417 A.D.

Zosimus, the Greek historian, in his six-book Roman history, describes the period from Augustus to 410 A.D. and thus includes not only the military career of Stilicho but also the circumstances surrounding his death in 408. As for the two church historians, Sozomen's History in nine volumes, dedicated to Theodosius II, deals with the hundred years down to 422 and runs parallel to that of Socrates Scholasticus, whose seven books on the Eastern emperors cover the period to 439 but do not mention Stilicho at all. Philostorgius, the Arian ecclesiastical historian, who lived most of his life in Constantinople, produced a Church history covering the period to 430, which only survives in fragments.

Claudian, in his History, makes numerous mentions of Stilicho, praising him as a superb military commander (First and second books against Rufinus, The war against Gildo, Against Eutropius, The Epithalamium, The fourth consulship of Honorius, The sixth consulship of Honorius and The Gothic war). A passage from the Epithalamium gives the tone of Claudian's ecstatic image of his hero:

quis consilio, quis iuris et aequi
 nosse modum melior? quod semper dissilit, in te
 convenit, ingenio robur, prudentia forti.
 fronte quis aequali? quem sic Romana decerent
 culmina? sufficerent tantis quae pectora curis?
 stes licet in populo, clamet quicumque videbit:
 "hic est, hic Stilicho!" 3

In his The War against Gildo and elsewhere⁴, Claudian mentions Stilicho's marriage to Serena, the niece of the emperor Theodosius I, daughter of his elder brother Honorius and of Marcia and younger sister of Thermantia. As the historian also brings in Maria, Stilicho's elder daughter, given as a wife in 398 to the younger emperor Honorius, much play can be made of Stilicho's rank of "father-in-law and son-in-law of an emperor"⁵. Eucherius is born to Serena in Rome in 389, about four years after Maria's birth; Thermantia, his younger sister, will in turn be given in marriage to Honorius after Maria dies in 408, as Zosimus recounts: "... Imperator autem Honorius, Maria coniuge iam pridem rebus humanis exempta, sororem eius Thermantiam sibi matrimonio iungi petebat"⁶.

Now elsewhere, and particularly in his shorter poem In praise of Serena, Claudian fills in details about Stili-

3. Claudian, ed. M. Platnauer, London, 1922, vol. I, p. 264, lines 313-319.

4. E.g. On Stilicho's consulship, book I, lines 69-88.

5. Ibid., line 78.

6. Zosimus, book V, ch. 28, ex recognitione I. Bekkeri, Bonnae, 1837, p. 285.

cho's wife, recounting how she helped her husband against Rufinus and how, after the death of her father Honorius, she was unofficially adopted by Theodosius as his daughter (laus Serenae, line 104). Of her help against Rufinus Claudian says:

Nec deside cura
segnis marcet amor: laudem prudentia belli
feminea pro parte subit. dum gentibus ille
confligit, vigili tu prospicis omnia sensu,
ne quid in absentem virtutibus obvia semper
audeat invidiae rabies neu fervor iniquus,
ne qua procul positis furto subsederit armis
callidatas nocitura domi. tu sedula quondam
Rufino meditante nefas, cum quaereret artes
in ducis exitium coniuratosque foveret
contra pila Getas, motus rimata latentes
mandatis tremebunda virum scriptisque monebas.⁷

This awareness was linked, Claudian tells us, to a gift for peace-making; Serena, he reports, had a calming influence on the temper of her adopter Theodosius:

ambas ille quidem patrio complexus amore,
sed merito pietas in te proclivior ibat;
et quotiens, rerum moles ut publica cogit,
tristior aut ira tumidus flagrante redibat,
cum patrem nati fugerent atque ipsa timeret
commotum Flaccilla virum, tu sola frementem
frangere, tu blando poteras sermone mederi.
adloquiis haerere tuis, secreta fateri.⁸

Placidia, daughter of Theodosius I and his second wife Galla, is not mentioned directly by Claudian in his history of Stilicho's consulship, but in the second book, a gold-woven garment appears to depict three couples: Stilicho and Serena, Honorius and Maria, and Placidia with Eucherius, Stilicho's son:

7. Claudian, laus Serenae, lines 225-236 in Claudian, ed. cit., vol. II, pp. 254-256.

8. Ibid., lines 132-139, p. 248.

Venus hic invecta columbis
 tertia regali iungit conubia nexu,
 pennatique nurum circumstipantur Amores
 progenitam Augustis Augustorumque sororem.⁹

This would suggest that in Claudian's mind Stilicho may have thought of marrying Eucherius to Placidia, in order to strengthen his own position and ensure that, if at all possible, the childless Honorius would be succeeded by his own son or his offspring. In fact, she will later marry Alaric's brother-in-law Athaulf.

But the main references in Claudian's various accounts are to Stilicho himself, and in the three books giving a history of his consulship, the author's adulation of his contemporary is not difficult to detect. True, at times, his military tasks leave him with little opportunity for family life. In a passage in book I of the de consulatu Stilichonis, lines 120-121, Eucherius is shown as deprived, like Serena, of attention from his over-successful father; Stilicho has no time for an embrace from his son:

nec stetit Eucherii dum carperet oscula saltem
 per galeam. patris stimulos ignisque mariti
 vicit cura ducis.

But later in this book, and again in book III, for example, nothing can tarnish the image of the God-like figure, for Claudian's account necessarily stops short of the hero's death. Thus in lines 291-303 of book I, for example, he exclaims:

Quid primum, Stilicho, mirer? quod cautus ad omnes
 restiteris fraudes, ut te nec noxia furto

9. De consulatu Stilichonis, book II, lines 354-357;
ibid., vol. II, p. 28.

littera nec pretio manus inflammata lateret?
 quod nihil in tanto circum terrore locutus
 indignum Latio? responsa quod ardua semper
 Eois dederis, quae mox effecta probasti-
 securus, quamvis et opes et rura tenerent
 insignesque domos? levis haec iactura; nec unquam
publica privatae cesserunt commoda causae.
 dividis ingentes curas teque omnibus unum
 obicis, inveniens animo quae mente gerenda,
 efficiens patranda manu, dictare paratus
 quae scriptis peragenda forent. ¹⁰

Further on, he continues (book III, lines 106-112):

cani virtutibus aevi
 materiam pandit Stilicho populumque vetusti
 culminis immemorem dominandi rursus in usum
 excitat, ut magnos calcet metuendus honores,
 pendat iustitia crimen, pietate remittat
 errorem purosque probet damnatque nocentes
 et patrias iterum clemens exerceat artes ¹¹

Nowhere does the reader catch a glimpse of the other side of Stilicho - for Claudian, he is a soldier and a military genius.

Orosius and Zosimus, along with Sozomen and Philostorgius, fill in the details of Stilicho's life between the consulship of 400 A.D. and his death in 408. To his account of how Theodosius entrusted the care of his children to Stilicho who, desiring Royal dignity for his son, supported the entry of the barbarians, "so that the needs of the state in the sudden crisis might veil his wicked aim"¹², Orosius adds the following version of the general's last acts:

10. Ibid., vol. I, pp. 384-386. My italics.

11. Ibid., vol. II, p. 50.

12. Pauli Orosii Historiarum adversum paganos, book VII, ch. 37, ex recognitione Caroli Zangemeister, Leipzig, 1889, p. 288: "ut rebus repente turbatis necessitas reipublicae scelus ambitus tegeret".

Interea comes Stilico, Vandalorum inbellis auaræ perfidæ et dolosæ gentis genere editus, parui pendens quod sub imperatore imperabat, Eucherium filium suum, sicut a plerisque traditur, iam inde Christianorum persecutionem a puero priuatoque meditantem, in imperium quoquo modo substituere nitebatur. quamobrem Alaricum cunctamque Gothorum gentem, pro pace optima et quibuscumque sedibus suppliciter ac simpliciter orantem, occulto foedere fouens, publice autem et belli et pacis copia negata, ad terendam terrendamque rempublicam reseruauit. præterea gentes alias copiis uiribusque intolerabiles, quibus nunc Galliarum Hispaniarumque prouinciæ premuntur, hoc est Alanorum Sueborum Vandalorum ipsoque simul motu impulsorum Burgundionum, ultro in arma sollicitans, detereso semel Romani nominis metu suscitauit. eas interim ripas Rheni quater et pulsare Gallias uoluit, sperans miser sub hac necessitatis circumstantia, quia et extorquere imperium genero posset in filium et barbaræ gentes tam facile comprimi quam commoueri ualerant. itaque ubi imperatori Honorio exercituique Romano hæc tantorum scelerum scaena patefacta est, commoto iustissime exercitu occisus est Stilico, qui ut unum puerum purpura indueret, totius generis humani sanguinem dedit; occisus Eucherius, qui ad conciliandum sibi fauorem paganorum restitutione templorum et euersione ecclesiarum inbuturum se regni primordia minabatur, paucique cum isdem satellites tantarum molitionum puniti sunt. ita minimo negotio paucorumque poena ecclesiæ Christi cum imperatore religioso et liberatae sunt et uindicatae. ¹³

The last months of Stilicho's life provide a fascinating contrast to his former loyalty, courage and leadership, first under the late Theodosius I, now under Honorius. In his Roman history Zosimus speaks of the military commander just before the period of his downfall, before ambition and greed had taken a complete hold of him:

vir (Stilicho) omnium, quotquot id temporis magna cum potestate fuerunt, modestissimus; licet enim filiae fratris Theodosii maioris matrimonio iunctus esset, amborumque Theodosii filiorum regna ei credita fuissent, et annos tres et viginti militum ducis munus gessisset, nunquam tamen animaduersum est eum militibus interveniente pecunia magistratus præfuisse vel annonam militarem in lucrum suum vertisse. cumque pater filii duntaxat unius esset, hanc ei

13. Ibid., ch. 38, pp. 291-292.

dignitatis metam statuit, ut ad officium Tribuni notariorum (quem vocant) provecto nullam aliam potestatem acquireret.¹⁴

The historical accounts of Stilicho's ambitious plans more or less concord, but the versions vary when it comes to relating how Honorius was informed of the potential treachery. We have seen Orosius' account of both episodes, in books 37 and 38 of his History against the pagans. What of Zosimus, Sozomen and Philostorgius?

Zosimus' version runs like this:

ac Stilicho quidem nullius indigni vel adversus imperatorem vel milites consilii sibi conscius haec agebat. Olympius vero quidam, oriundus a Ponto Euxino, splendida quadam militia palatina donatus, qui sub specie pietatis Christianae magnam intra se malitiam tegeret, atque hominem se frugi modestumque simulans cum principe colloqui frequenter soleret, multa, ut cum poeta loquar, animum labefactantia verba contra Stilichonem effundiebat, quod eam nimirum ob causam iter illud in Orientem sibi mandari curasset, ut Theodosio minori morte per insidias structa regnum Eucherio filio suo traderet.¹⁵

Sozomen is very brief in his Ecclesiastical history:

Stilico vero Magister militum Honorii, cum in suspicionem venisset, quod filium suum Eucherium Orientis Imperatorem renuntiare vellet, a militibus qui Ravennae erant, occiditur. Hic porro jam antea, superstite adhuc Arcadio, cum adversus duces illius inimicitias suscepisset, utrumque Imperium inter se committere studuerat.¹⁶

Philostorgius, though, goes into greater detail, first in chapter 3 of book XI:

In Orientis quidem partibus Rufinus apud Arcadium summam potestatem obtinebat: In Occidente autem Stilicho apud Honorium eundem obtinebat locum. Uterque enim istorum, Imperii nomen ac speciem penes utrumque filiorum Theodosii remanere facile passus, robur Imperii penes se retinuit. Alter sub Magistri militum, alter sub Praefecti appellatione Imperatori

14. Zosimus, book V, ch. 34; ed. cit., p.296. My italics.

15. Ibid., ch. 32, pp. 291-292.

16. Sozomeni Ecclesiastica Historia Henrico Valesio interprete, book IX, ch. 4, Cantabrigiae, 1720, p. 369.

suo imperans. Neuter porro illorum eo loco quem apud principes suos obtinebat, contentus fuit. Nam Rufinus quidem etiam Imperatorium nomen ad se ipsum trahere omni arte studebat: Stilicho vero filio suo Eucherio Imperium vindicare nitebatur.¹⁷

Then, in the next book, he continues in these terms:

Omne enim insidiarum genus adversus Imperatorem struxisse ait Stilichonem, nec ob id saltem reveritum esse quod generum illum haberet, data illi in matrimonium filia; sed portionem ei praeuisse, qua procreandae sobolis facultas adimeretur: neque illud animadvertit, se, dum Eucherium filium Imperatorem contra jus fasque renuntiare studeret, nepotem cui successionis jure Imperium debebatur, ante adultum florem succidere ac perdere. Porro Stilichonem adeo manifeste ac sine ullo metu tyrannidem exercuisse scribit, ut etiam nummos percuteret, in quibus praeter ipsius effigiem nihil deerat.¹⁸

But the most interesting detail, not given in Sozomen, and only mentioned in passing by Zosimus (book V, ch. 32), is Philostorgius' account of the one man, Olympius or Olympiodorus, who saw through Stilicho's plans, and while the general was in Bologna, stirred up his troops which were being reviewed by Honorius at Pavia. Stilicho, refusing to believe that any action need be taken to quell this mutiny, is in the end forced to flee to Ravenna. The epitome of Philostorgius runs:

Refert etiam quomodo Olympius quidam Magister, gladium qui adversus Imperatorem strictus erat in palatio, manu sua corripuens, seipsum quidem laeserit. Imperatorem vero servavit, eique ad occidendum Stilichonem qui tunc Ravennae morabatur, operam ac ministerium suum commodaverit. Alii hunc non Olympium, sed Olympiodorum nominant: Nec Imperatori suppetias eum tulisse dicunt, sed Stilichoni

17. Ex Ecclesiasticis Philostorgii Historiis epitome, Henrico Valesio interprete, book XI, ch. 3, Cantabrigiae, 1720, p. 539. My italics.

18. Book XII, ch. 2, pp. 543-544.

bene de se merito insidias struxisse, eumque affectatae tyrannidis falso accusasse. Nec Magistrum eo tempore adhuc fuisse scribunt, sed post injustam Stilichonis caedem, eam dignitatem praemii loco accepisse. Eundem tamen haud multo post fustibus interfectum, nefariae caedis poenas pependisse Stilichoni.¹⁹

Finally, Sozomen, very briefly, and then Zosimus, at greater length, recount Stilicho's death:

Ipsa quoque Stilico a militibus occisus est Ravennae: vir, si quis unquam, ad magnam potentiam eVectus, & qui universos, ut ita dicam, Romanos ac Barbaros sibi parentes habuit.²⁰

ea re cognita vicinam quandam Christianorum ecclesiam intempesta nocte ingressus est Stilicho. quod conspicati barbari qui cum eo erant, aique familiares, armati cum servis suis quid futurum esset dispiciunt. posteaquam illuxisset, ingressi sunt ecclesiam milites, et episcopo praesente iureiurando Stilichoni confirmarunt non imperatum esse sibi a principe ut eum necarent, sed tantum ut custodirent. cum vero egressus extra ecclesiam sub custodia militum esse coepisset, alterae reddebantur ab eo qui priores attulerat literae, in quibus Stilichonis²¹ in rem publicam delictis poena capitis irrogabatur.

What of Eucherius? After the death of his father he flees to Rome, Zosimus tells us ("Eucherio Stilichonis filio fuga, cum haec fierent, versus urbem Romam elapso") and there takes shelter in a church: "quem ubi fuga quandam in ecclesiam Romae delatum repperissent, ob loci reverentiam missum fecerunt". Later he is killed by Honorius' eunuchs²².

Philostorgius adds his version of the events, in book

19. Book XII, ch. 1, p. 543.

20. Sozomen, book IX, ch. 4; ed. cit., p. 370.

21. Zosimus, book V, ch. 34; ed. cit., p. 295.

22. Zosimus, book V, ch. 34, 35, 37; ed. cit., pp. 295, 297, 300.

XII of his History:

Interfecto Stilichone, Barbari qui una cum illo erant, assumpto eius filio statim abscesserunt. Cumque Romam appropinquassent, huic quidem permiserunt ut in templum quoddam quod jure asyli fruebatur, confugeret. Ipsi vero cuncta quae circa urbem erant vastarunt: tum ut Stilichonem ulciscerentur, tum quod fame pressi erant. Ubi vero literae ab Honorio missae jure asyli potentiores, Eucherium morte multarunt, post haec Barbari Alarico²³ juncti, eum ad expugnandam urbem Romam incitarunt.

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Thomas Corneille was thus faced with two main accounts - those of Orosius and Zosimus - for his treatment of the last actions of Stilicho, and could supplement these with Claudian's version of the general at the height of his career and with the more restricted accounts of Sozomenus and Philostorgius. If Claudian may have provided an inspiration in his depiction of an almost superhumanly energetic character, it is in Orosius and Zosimus that the events of 408 are told. Yet when we come to examine the tragedy, it is at once clear that Thomas Corneille has made considerable changes to the historical narrative and has decided to ignore a number of points which one might have thought would have proved useful to him as a dramatist.

He has, for example, omitted Serena, Stilicho's wife who was still living at the time of her husband's death in Ravenna. We have seen that Claudian makes much of Serena - the poet himself seems to have married a protégée of hers in 404, very shortly before his death - and her rôle as a

23. Philostorgius, book XII, ch. 3; ed. cit., p. 544.

helper and a peacemaker could have allowed Thomas to turn her into an important confidante of Stilicon. Zosimus, too, in his Roman history, adds to our knowledge of the historical character. She allowed the marriage of Honorius and Thermantia to go through in 408, following Maria's death, and this despite opposition from her husband, who wished Honorius to remain childless so that he (Stilicho) could have imperial heirs through Placidia and Eucherius:

in hoc Stilicho quidem haud assensurus videbatur,
sed urgebat Serena, quae hasce nuptias ob huiusmodi
causam conciliari vellet.

While her husband sought to increase his influence by trying to separate the Eastern and Western Empires, Serena strove for reconciliation²⁴. Before Stilicho's downfall, Honorius breaks with the new empress Thermantia and sends her back to her mother Serena in Rome:

imperator autem Honorius uxorem Thermantiam, augustali delectam solio, matri suae reddi iussit, nulla tamen iccirco suspicione gravatam, et filium Stelichonis Eucherium pervestigatum undique iugulari²⁵.

Not long afterwards, recounts Zosimus, Serena is executed by Alaric when he besieges Rome in the autumn of 408, on a charge that she intended to betray him:

cum iam Alarichus prope Roman esset et inclusos obsidione cinxisset, Serenam senatus suspectam habere coepit, quasi quae barbaros adversus urbem attraxisset. censuitque pariter et universus senatus et Placidia, principis uterina soror, Serenam esse necandam, quae praesentium malorum auctor existeret. nam et Alarichum ipsum Serena de medio sublata discessurum ab urbe, quod nemo superaturus esset, a quo ille sibi proditum iri urbem sperare posset. erat autem haec quidem suspicio reapse falsa: nam nihil huiusmodi Serenae ad animum acciderat²⁶.

24. Zosimus, book V, ch. 28; ed. cit., pp. 285-286.

25. Zosimus, book V, ch. 35; ed. cit., p. 297.

26. Zosimus, book V, ch. 38; ed. cit., p. 301.

Serena plays no part in Thomas' play: Stilicon stands alone between two couples, Honorius and Thermantie and Euchérius and Placidie, although with an important stake in both camps. He is too purposeful a figure, too diabolical a conspirator to need an adviser to mastermind his ambitious schemes. At most he has a confidant, Mutian, who plays a very minor rôle.

A second omission by Thomas Corneille is the character of Olympius or Olympiodorus brought to life by Philostorgius' account, although this would probably only be a secondary source for Thomas Corneille, and we cannot be sure that he read the account. But Olympius' role as the only man aware of Stilicho's plotting has great dramatic potential, and Philostorgius' version of how he saved Honorius from assassination could have formed an early part of the unmasking of the conspirator, providing a scene on the lines of the assassination attempts in Amalasonte or in Thomas' Camma, which will appear in 1661. Alternatively, Thomas Corneille could have made use of the second version of the story, the tale of Olympiodorus, his plots against Stilicho, the suggestion that Olympiodorus' claims are unjust, and so built up in Stilicho a figure who is admired for his acts and receiving sympathy for the attacks made upon him. Whichever form of Philostorgius' account he used, Thomas could ultimately have come to show up Stilicon as an ambitious conspirator, working under cover to establish Euchérius in Honorius' place.

Serena, then, and Olympius/Olympiodorus are discarded. What remains, and what changes are made to the historical

characters whose names, at least, are kept by the dramatist? First, the women. Thermantia, Stilicho's daughter and wife of the emperor, was, historically, sent back to her mother just before Stilicho's collapse, as we have seen Zosimus relate (book V, ch. 35). Thomas Corneille moves the scene of Stilicho's death from Ravenna to Rome, so his Thermantie finds herself in the right place, but in reality she should be out of contact with her husband. Thomas, indeed, gives her only a small part in the play, although having kept her on the scene he could, if he had wanted, have made capital out of the presence of Eucherius and built up a link between brother and sister. The second female character, Placidia in history, is altered beyond recognition. Claudian's brief mention in the second book of his account of Stilicho's consulship is blown up into a relationship between Placidie and Eucherius and between Placidie and Honorius and Stilicon which has caused some comment and which I will deal with shortly. Orosius filled out slightly the picture of Placidia which was briefly sketched by Claudian: the daughter of Theodosius, we are told in chapter 40 of book VII, is captured and married to Alaric's brother-in-law Athaulf when the former storms Rome after Stilicho's death. In chapter 43 she is described as a woman of keenest intelligence and exceptional piety, giving good advice to her husband Athaulf; she was, says Orosius, "*sane ingenio acerrimae & religionis satis probatae*". Recent American critics would doubt the "keen intelligence" of Thomas Corneille's Placidie, although she is not nearly as foolish as they make out; her piety does

not enter into the play.

On the male side the Alaric of Orosius' chapter 38 is altered to become a possible replacement for Eucherius in his endeavour to satisfy Placidie's longing for a husband able to dominate all in authority. Honorius is rather more obtuse than in any of the historians, blinded by Stilicon's machinations and unable, until too late, to pierce the conspirator's sophistry and see that Eucherius is innocent. "Ah! vous seule, ma Soeur, en avez bien jugé" (V.4). As for Eucherius and Stilicon, their roles are immeasurably altered, the former's partly because of the new Placidie, who also provides the excuse for Stilicon's decision to go ahead with the conspiracy (I.6). Eucherius, the persecutor of Christians in Orosius, put to death because of this, becomes the victim of his father's political ambitions, and this despite his considerable valour, which Honorius emphasises.²⁷ Stilicon, for his part, unravelling a plot which none of the historians begins to describe, dies a hero's death at his own hand and avoids the ignominy of execution after a soldiers' mutiny, as Orosius recounts. Stilicho the son of a Vandal is transformed into Stilicon, a dependable, respectable Imperial aide²⁸.

27. Honorius, I.4: Stilicon, que toujours ont craint nos Ennemis,
Se verroit sans égal s'il n'avoit point de Fils.
De mille exploits fameux le superbe avantage
En tous lieux à l'envy fait briller leur courage

28. In his Dictionnaire universel published in Paris in 1708, Thomas gives the following account of Stilicon's end. It will be seen that, in what claims to be a scientific account, he reverts to the historians for his version of the death of the conspirator. "L'honneur que l'Empereur avoit fait à Stilicon d'épouser sa fille, ne put satisfaire son ambition. Il avoit un fils appelé Eucherius, qu'il voulut mettre sur le Trône, & les pratiques qu'il fit contre la vie de son Maître, ayant été découvertes, Honorius les fit mourir l'un & l'autre avec leurs complices." (vol. III, p. 280.)

Thomas Corneille's treatment of his possible historical sources is far from being negligible, as Reynier's remark would suggest. A couple of potentially dramatic characters have not been taken up, and the others, with the possible exception of Honorius, have been transformed, radically in the case of Placidie, Euchérius and Stilicon. History does not relate in detail the circumstances of Stilicho's plot, but the image of a father conspiring to raise his son to power provides the dramatist with a starting-point and the first elements of his character-portrayals.

What of the overall structure of Stilicon? The play can, at a pinch, be said to have two plots, the scenes of Euchérius' love for Placidie and those devoted to Stilicon's conspiracy against Honorius. Or rather one can distinguish three levels in the tragedy: the "active" conspiracy, which forms the starting-point for the action (I.6), continues behind the scenes during acts II, III and IV and comes to the foreground again in the second scene between Stilicon and Mutian in V.1; the enquiry which Honorius institutes and which is entrusted first to Euchérius, then to his father; and finally the sentimental development of Placidie. A modern critic has found, however, that the parts of the play dealing with Placidie and with Stilicon's ambitious plans violate the unity of action. In Commode, he says, "Thomas Corneille a assez habilement uni l'intérêt sentimental et l'intérêt politique", whereas in Stilicon the dramatist has grafted on to the main conspiracy "une péripétie fondée sur un intérêt sentimental: Euchérius est

amoureux de Placidie, soeur de l'empereur Honorius, qui l'aime, mais ... qui refuse par orgueil de l'épouser. Cet épisode n'avance en rien l'action, sauf que Stilicon saisit ce prétexte, bien faible, pour fomenter sa conspiration contre Honorius ... Nous avons là un petit commencement d'intrigue secondaire dont l'auteur n'a tiré aucun parti"²⁹.

In reality the three threads of the action are necessarily linked, for Placidie's feelings depend largely on Eucherius' reaction to Honorius' enquiry, while the latter is itself a means used by Stilicon to further his own cause. We shall have to ask ourselves later, however, whether Thomas, although achieving an adequate series of links, was obliged to include so much material and, if so, whether he has kept each part within proper proportions. The action is, as we shall see, unified and does not suffer from the same defect as La Mort de l'empereur Commode where, despite the link existing between the two uneven parts, the discovery of the tablettes does, at least at first sight, seem like a deus ex machina. Jacques Scherer, too, is surely wrong when he claims that Stilicon's death, recounted

29. F.-J. Tanqueray, "La technique de la composition dans les tragédies de Corneille et de Racine", R.C.C., XLI (n° 12), 30 May 1940, pp. 281-282. In addition to these remarks on the action's unity, Tanqueray comments on Stilicon and Eucherius in a manner which suggests that he has not studied the play at all closely. "Pour des motifs personnels, qui nous semblent futiles et tout à fait injustifiés, Stilicon conspire contre l'empereur Honorius; son fils, Eucherius, reste délibérément à l'écart du complot" (p. 282). Thomas Corneille, however, provides Stilicon with more than sufficient reasons for conspiring, and Eucherius does not have the chance to remain "deliberately" outside the plot.

in act V scene 8, is a "changement brusque et imprévu"³⁰. His suicide, the final deed in the play, is clearly foreshadowed by his very nature and in particular by his last words on stage, when he exits on

Scachant ce qui m'est dû, Seigneur, je vais l'attendre,
Et connois trop encor un reste de devoir,
Pour vous plus exposer à l'horreur de me voir. (V.6)

The distribution of characters and scenes emphasises both the different levels and the unity of the action. Honorius is present most regularly and in most scenes (twenty out of the thirty-one), although his rôle is not the most important. Thermantie, his wife, is the least frequent character, appearing in act I to back up Honorius' pleas to Placidie and again briefly in the second half of the play, where she begs her husband to exercise clemency on Eucherius (IV.6). But her main business will be done off-stage, in receiving the warning letter from Zénon (II.3) and protecting Honorius with extra guards, as the emperor himself recounts in V.4. Placidie, developed, as we have seen, from slight historical indications, occupies sixteen scenes, more than either Stilicon or Eucherius. After her initial appearance in the exposition (scenes 4 and 5), she has two parallel appearances at the beginning of acts II and IV, a scene with her confidante Lucile (II.1 and IV.1) followed by an interview with Eucherius (II.2 and IV.3). Both she and Thermantie are absent from stage from the end of act II scene 2 to act III scene 4, during the part of the play concerned with Zénon's murder and the identity of

30. J. Scherer, La dramaturgie classique en France, Paris, 1950, p. 87.

the assassin. These seven central scenes are thus exclusively occupied by the male characters, but Thomas Corneille has not fallen into the trap of weakening this effective exclusion of the women from an episode which does not directly concern them by having their re-appearance in III.4 (their only meeting in the play) marked by a long récit of what has happened since their departure. Thermantie had heard rumours of her brother's apparent guilt ("Ah, Seigneur, que vient-on de me dire?", II.4) and the very long scene of that act leads naturally into expressions of Thermantie's surprise and Placidie's confidence in Eucharis, further developed in the young woman's stirring speeches of IV.4. Placidie occupies all but the first scene of act V, her interview with Stilicon (scene 2) marking the start of his downfall and the remaining scenes contributing to her own self-realisation as she is gradually forced to publicly admit her love and previous misjudgements.

Both Eucharis and Stilicon are present in scenes in each of the first four acts, but the father stands poignantly alone in act V, after the death of his son. Stilicon's appearances earlier in the play are noticeably concentrated at the end of the acts: the last two scenes of act I and act II, scenes two to four of act III and the last scene of act IV, coming in there only after Eucharis has had two difficult interviews with the Emperor (IV.5 and 6). Although father and son figure in thirteen scenes each, they only meet four times: II.2, III.2 and 3 and IV.7,

whereas Stilicon shares eight scenes with his intended victim, Honorius³¹. Yet the very nature of Stilicon's activity demands that he work behind the scenes, through other characters, and his influence on the play and on Euchérius in particular is felt throughout the last four acts. Thomas Corneille has drawn the logical consequences from the historical situation, seeing that the dramatisation of the conspiracy was greatly helped by the closeness of Stilicon's relations to three, at least, of the other characters. Father-in-law and former guardian of Honorius, father of the emperor's wife Thermantie and of Euchérius, Stilicon can wield his power over them; his constant access to Honorius is a fruit not merely of his military exploits but of the family relationship. Only Placidie is at a slight remove from the conspirator, and in fact he meets her but twice before act V (in I.5 and III.4), although the first of these scenes, with its cutting rebuff ("Je voy ce que le Ciel l'a voulu faire naistre") provides the excuse for Stilicon to set in motion his long-prepared plans.

The first act of the play provides an excellent exposition in which all the five main characters appear at least twice and where the tension gradually builds up to a climax in the final scene. From the first pair of brothers and sisters (Euchérius and Thermantie, scenes 1 and 2)

31. Stilicon, II.5-6; III.2-4; IV.7; V.4 and 6. Euchérius meets Honorius ten times: I.2; II.3 and 6; III.1-3; IV.4-7.

Thomas passes to the second and more important (Honorius and Placidie, scene 4) before introducing Stilicon (scenes 5 and 6). Only this last scene is devoted to the conspiracy, the first five being an exposé of Placidie's unwillingness to marry Eucherius because of his relatively low rank. The Placidie affair is presented gradually. Thermantie and Eucherius provide a fairly full account of it, seen as it were from a distance - Eucherius is from the outset convinced that he has no chance: "Je puis en soupirer, mais j'y dois consentir", I.1 - , then Honorius adds his comments and Imperial authority. Before Placidie appears, Thomas Corneille has been careful to include a dialogue between Honorius and Thermantie where the views of the previous two scenes are given nuances. Thermantie has reservations about persuading Placidie, but the emperor's mind is made up and his own gloire is at stake. When he meets his sister the inevitable clash occurs between two sets of absolute ideas and Stilicon, in scene five, gets the tail-end of the stubbornness which Honorius had aroused in Placidie. One could almost say that it is Honorius, not Placidie, who sends Stilicon's plot on its way in scene 6, although the dramatist has taken care to avoid a meeting between the emperor and his general before the second last scene of act II.

Scene six provides a vivid contrast to the preceding ones, for even in scene five, and certainly in the previous four, the audience could not have suspected the existence of a plot. Yet Stilicon has all the details fixed ("tout

prest d'éclater / Un lasche repentir ne sçauroit m'arres-
 ter", I.6) and the scene can be, and is, more devoted to
 explanations by the conspirator than to arranging the work-
 ings of the conspiracy. As befits such an important bid
 for power, preparation has been made behind the scenes and
 will go on, during the interval, at Zénon's house. So if
 the Placidie episode appears to take up an inordinate
 amount of space in act I, we must realise that its presen-
 tation, slowly in front of a succession of witnesses and
 the character herself, is quite different from that of
 Stilicon's conspiracy. Thomas Corneille has provided a
 presentation of the two situations which is in accordance
 with their content and the nature of the characters invol-
 ved.

The exposition can be said to be complete by the end
 of act I, by which time both main topics - conspiracy and
 love-affair - have been treated. Most of the next three
 acts, dominated by the three main male characters, will be
 concerned with Honorius' enquiry into the letter that is
 received from Zénon (II.3) and the circumstances surrounding
 the latter's murder, recounted by Mutian in III.3. Ther-
 mantie and Placidie take second place in these three cen-
 tral acts, the first appearing in only three scenes out
 of seventeen, the second in seven. Zénon's warning letter
 forms the main péripétie of the play, coming as a surprise
 to all the characters, but it and the ensuing investigation
 are clearly linked to Stilicon's conspiracy, primarily be-
 cause Zénon is attempting to provide warning of its exis-
 tence but also, and more importantly from the dramatic angle,

because Stilicon is eventually placed in charge of the enquiries and thus controls both his own plot and the bid to undermine it. Act V brings the audience back to the plot, its apparent success, then the news of its failure and the gradual downfall of the conspirator.

But the structural pattern is not as straightforward as this. If it were, criticisms about the unity of action might well be justified. There are two points to consider here. Firstly, into the noeud Thomas Corneille has inserted two confrontations between Placidie and Euchérius (II.2 and IV.3), prepared by dialogues with her confidante (II.1 and IV.1). The first of these is a natural outcome of the information given in act I: the two characters had to meet after the portrait of Placidie painted by Thermantie, Euchérius and the emperor. The second meeting takes place in quite different circumstances when Euchérius, exonerated momentarily (IV.1), is again accused (IV.2) of Zénon's murder. But, as I hope to show when dealing with Placidie's important rôle in the play, neither meeting is entirely lacking in a love-element, far from it. If the first of the scenes relates back to Stilicon's ambition and Honorius' gloire, and the second is directly connected with Euchérius' part in the investigations concerning Zénon, both together form an important step in what, in act V, will be seen to be Placidie's significant sentimental development.

Secondly, Thomas Corneille has realised that, while the double rôle of Stilicon the conspirator and Stilicon the conspirator-hunter has great possibilities, the char-

acter must not be allowed to dominate Euchérius, while at the same time enough evidence has to be forthcoming to condemn the son and ease Honorius' acceptance of what Stilicon will tell him. Thus, when Zénon's letter is received, it is Euchérius, not his father, who is put in charge of immediate investigation ("Ton zele me répond de tout ce que j'attens" - Honorius, II.3) and Stilicon himself does not arrive until two scenes later. Although he characteristically offers a helping hand to Honorius (II.6) and is told "Change, dispose, agy", it is only when Euchérius has been discredited in the middle of act III that the father is given complete control (III.4).

The core of the play takes on the following pattern: two scenes of the love plot at the start of act II, followed by over an act in which Euchérius is able to maintain his dignity and innocence. The close of act III coincides with the intensification of Honorius' investigations, now entrusted to Stilicon. After a return to the love plot in the first half of act IV, the remainder of the act deals with the murder investigation, in what is virtually a trial of Euchérius. Now clearly, as I have suggested, these divisions are at best arbitrary, for the accusations against Euchérius are allowed, indeed fostered, by Stilicon, ostensibly to favour his son's cause, just as Camma will allow Sostrate to take the blame for what appears to be an assassination attempt on Sinorix in III.3 of Camma. The betrayal by Zénon forces Stilicon's hand but the search for his murderer and the conspirator's own plans are obviously linked. Placidie, too, by her unwillingness or hesitation

to accept Euchérius unless his status is raised, provides a further dimension to Stilicon's aim of overthrowing Honorius and giving his son the power he needs.

Each of the three central acts of the play presents its difficulties to the dramatist and each is tackled in a different spirit. One important point which Thomas Corneille has to bear in mind results from his decision to have the conspiracy and the chief conspirator revealed in the very first act. No other character in the play, least of all Euchérius, has definite proof of what is going on until the dénouement. Both Honorius and Placidie see briefly that either Euchérius or his father must be guilty, as only the latter two and Honorius knew of the arranged meeting between the emperor and Zénon, but neither follows this up and Honorius, perhaps naturally suspecting Euchérius first, has little cause to consider the other possibility in view of Stilicon's own plausible condemnation of his son. Euchérius, dying in order to defend Honorius, will never know of the conspiracy conducted supposedly in his favour. But for the audience Stilicon's good faith is jeopardised: each of his six appearances in acts II, III and IV is in front of Honorius and all but two with Euchérius as well. Here both they and we the audience have but one consistent view of Stilicon the double agent, and only in the opening scene of act V does the true figure reappear as he was in I.6. Until then, the public which is in the know has to treat all that Stilicon says as untrue; its insight into his plans and the workings of the

conspiracy comes, as it were, at second hand³².

The main dramatic interest of the second act lies less in the scenes with Placidie at the beginning than with Stilicon at the end. Honorius' confident dispatch of Euchérius to deal with the problem of Zénon's letter (II.3) is followed almost immediately by Stilicon's arrival. This fifth scene shows both a well thought-out and skilfully handled situation and a moment of tension which could have been much better exploited. The two incidents are closely linked and perhaps Thomas has chosen to concentrate on the more important. Firstly news that "on conspire" takes Stilicon by surprise and creates a situation not unlike that at the beginning of act II of Cinna, for neither Stilicon nor Cinna/Maxime know how far the emperor is aware of their plot. In Thomas' play the effect is perhaps even more successful than in Pierre's, for while Cinna has time to ponder and decide a course of action between acts I and II, Stilicon must give an immediate reply to Honorius. In the second place, once the effect of the news has sunk in, Honorius assures his general that the matter is being looked into ("L'ordre est donné, demeure, on me va tout apprendre", II.5), but he makes no mention of Euchérius' name and because of the short intervening scene between the emperor and Marcellin (II.4), Stilicon has not even seen Euchérius take his leave of Honorius. Had this situation been developed,

32. One small chink in the armour is the aparté assurance to Mutian at the end of act III (scene 4).

Stilicon could have overreached himself in his eagerness, although it is doubtful whether the Honorius that Th. Corneille portrays would have grasped the meaning any better than he does in the present play. As it is, Eucherius' return puts an end to the ambiguity and allows Stilicon to cast suspicions on Zénon's character (II.6).

The central act of the play is even more compact that the second and appropriately marks the turning-point in Eucherius' fortunes. The pace of the plot increases, through another intelligent use of the interval, for Stilicon, between the end of act II and his re-entry in III.2, has been as diligent as Eucherius, whose errand called him away from II.3 to II.6. Stilicon's power, rendered quasi-official by Honorius, is now so great that steps must be taken to offset its effect on the audience and perhaps on the very characters. Thus scene 3, the first long battle between Stilicon and Honorius and Eucherius, is sandwiched between two incidents that give us a truer picture of Eucherius: scene one, his dialogue with Honorius, which otherwise seems superfluous, but which serves to show that the emperor is still on friendly terms with Stilicon's son; and the closing aparté of scene four, when Stilicon counters Mutian's worried question by assuring him that "Je sçais ce que je fais, ne t'en mets point en peine". Yet the contrast between scene 1 and scene 3 and between Stilicon's closing remarks and his all-out attack earlier in scene 4 is eventually to the detriment of Eucherius and to the strengthening of Stilicon. It is

the all-powerfulness of the conspirator, his credibility, which creates difficulties of dramatisation for Thomas Corneille. Honorius may seem gullible, and Euchérius ineffective: but their reactions to Stilicon are natural ones, and Euchérius in particular can do little but protest his innocence. The dramatist is obliged, therefore, to present the events in an order and with a timing which at once brings out the commanding position of Stilicon and attempts to offset the chances of his actions.

It is Euchérius' helplessness which dictates the ordering of scenes in the fourth act. Like many fourth acts, that in Stilicon marks little progress in the action, being rather a time in which the characters take further stock of the situation and make or strengthen decisions which were already all but made in act III. Act IV contains what amounts to the trial of Euchérius, but to avoid a mere repetition of the last two scenes of act III, the dramatist must introduce fresh details or give old ones new expression. His task is to offset the power of Honorius backed by Stilicon, to keep Euchérius' chances alive as long as possible, for without this the play will come to a sudden end. To achieve the proper balance, then, Thomas has created three main points of interest and spaced them throughout the act, in scenes 1, 4 and 6. The first scene is in the nature of a counter-péripétie, when Lucile informs Placidie that according to Mutian, Stilicon's confidant, it is Félix, not Euchérius, who assassinated Zénon. But Placidie's joy is short-lived, for in the next

scene Marcellin says that Félix denies any responsibility and puts the blame back on Euchérius. The effect on Placidie is not what we might have expected; as we shall see shortly, her opposition to Euchérius begins to crumble (scene 3) and her declaration of confidence in his innocence (scene 4) is the first positive step in his favour.

The second comes in scene 6, with Thermantie's plea for mercy. The sister's appeal follows Honorius' fruitless attempt to get a confession out of Euchérius and partly achieves its purpose when the emperor relents. But when Euchérius again refuses to admit guilt and Stilicon (scene 7) declines to accept grace for his son, the action moves on: Euchérius' fate seems now sealed ("Traistre, tu veux perir, il faut te contenter") and Stilicon's commanding position assured.

Thomas Corneille's main problem, then, in acts II, III and IV, has been one of disposition of scenes, the ordering of events. He has to try to maintain two things. Firstly, a difficult balance between three widely different characters: a powerless Euchérius, a gullible emperor and a scheming conspirator, especially when for most of the time Honorius sides with Stilicon, and Thermantie and Placidie, who could come to Euchérius' aid, are absent from the stage. Secondly, the tension must not be allowed to flag; the very helplessness of two of the three male

characters is not in itself enough to maintain the audience's interests³³.

If, as I think he is, Thomas Corneille is largely successful in maintaining a tense situation up until the end of the noeud, the dénouement is conducted with no less skill. The unmasking of Stilicon is delayed as long as possible, until the sixth of the eight scenes, and in the end it is he himself who confesses his guilt, not Honorius who accuses him of it. In these circumstances Stilicon is left free to exit (scene 6), and the last scene has arrived before we, and the other characters, learn of his suicide. The fate of the protagonist is thus determined in the very closing seconds, leaving Honorius time for only nine lines of comment before the curtain falls.

Now, this well-managed ending comes at the conclusion of a busy act. With Thermantie offstage and Euchérius first defending Honorius and then dead, it is left to Placidie, Stilicon and the emperor to hold the fort,

33. As Fontenelle will remark (Réflexions sur la poétique, XX, in OEuvres complètes, Paris, J.-F. Bastien, 1790, vol. III, pp. 128-129): "Un des grands secrets pour piquer la curiosité, c'est de rendre l'événement incertain ... Honorius voit clairement que Stilicon, ou Eucherius, ses deux favoris, sont les chefs de la conjuration, parce qu'ils étaient les seuls qui sçussent que l'Empereur devoit donner une audience secrète à Felix (sic, for: Zénon). Voilà un noeud qui met Honorius & Stilicon & Eucherius dans une situation très-embarrassante, & il est très-difficile d'imaginer comment ils en sortiront. Qui seroit-ce qui pourroit laisser la Pièce en cet endroit-là? Tout ce qui serre le noeud d'avantage, tout ce qui le rend plus mal aisé à dénouer, ne peut manquer de faire un bel effet. Il faudroit même, s'il se pouvoit, faire craindre aux Spectateurs que le noeud ne se peut pas dénouer heureusement."

supported by a considerable number of écits (Lucile's in scene 3, Honorius' in scene 4, and two by Marcellin, scenes 5 and 8). Up until scene 4, Stilicon's position is secure: the opening dialogue with Mutian, the return to the active conspiracy, is a further expression of his confidence and whatever effect Placidie's attack on him in scene 2 might have had is offset by the report of Eucherius' assassination of Honorius. Coming as it does, Lucile's account delays further consideration of Stilicon's guilt, but Thomas Corneille has little time left: Honorius reappears as if from the dead (scene 4) and the surprise prevents both him and Placidie from questioning Stilicon who departs, to return only when the emperor, Placidie and he have learnt of Eucherius' death.

Contemporary critics gave Stilicon a good reception. If Somaize found it "tout à fait beau" and Saint-Evremond was touched by it, the Mercure galant éloge of Thomas shortly after his death stated that "personne n'ignore qu'elle fut le charme de tout Paris". De Boze, in a rather erratic passage of his funeral oration to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres at the rentrée after Easter of the same year, places Stilicon among the plays which, he recounts, Pierre Corneille said he would have liked to have written. But it is Loret, echoed in the next century by the frères Parfaict, who provides the most helpful comment for once. This usually indiscriminating chronicler was bowled over by the "incontestable conduite" of the play's plot and praised the beauty of the action which came off so well "que j'en fus très-émerveillé". In their his-

tory the Parfaict brothers distinguish between the play's versification, which they find "foible & entortillée, & remplie de choses inutiles" and the play's structure, described as "régulière .. & parfaitement bien conduite"³⁴.

This distinction is a useful one and whatever can be said of Thomas as a versifier and poet, it is his specifically dramatic skills which concern us now. Stilicon is an essentially active play - the complete absence of monologues is a sign of this - but although the progress of Stilicon's plans is not denied by critics, the same cannot be said for Placidie's. In order to appreciate the nature of the play, the meaning that Thomas Corneille wished to give it and the means used to this end, it is important to fully understand Placidie's rôle and how it fits into and helps the play's structure.

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There seems to be considerable lack of appreciation, indeed misunderstanding, of Placidie's function. In discussing the 1660 tragedy, critics have resolutely shut their eyes to anything above the humble level at which they place Thomas Corneille's talent. Lancaster judges

34. Somaize, Les Véritables pretieuses (1660), ed. P. Lacroix, Geneva, 1868, p. 36; Saint-Evremond, Sur les tragédies in OEuvres en prose, ed. R. Ternois, Paris, 1966, vol. III, p. 28; Mercure galant, January 1710, p. 270; de Boze, Eloge de Thomas Corneille, in OEuvres de Th. Corneille, avec les Commentaires de Voltaire, Paris, A.-A. Renouard, 1817, p. 58; Loret, Muse historique, 31 January 1660, lines 211-215; Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, Paris, 1745-1749, vol. VIII, pp. 342 and 344.

the heroine of Stilicon in a single line: "Placidia is so devoted to her 'gloire' that she seems utterly lacking in feeling"³⁵. D.A. Collins confirms what Lancaster said thirty years before and appears to pass the character by completely, seeing no sentimental development in her. For Collins, "Placidie nurtures along with a dogged wilfulness an unconscionable pride"; in other words she is "on the whole ... unconvincing", indeed "grotesquely portrayed", for as all men, it was Thomas' all-consuming desire to one day depict "a female of indomitable will and pride just as Pierre had done"³⁶. A final example of critical treatment of the "female" is Lacy Lockert's, in his Studies in French-classical tragedy³⁷. According to the last of these three American writers,

Placidia would be equally difficult to match among 'proud' heroines for sheer perversity and dislikableness. Unlike many of the princesses in the plays who disdain to wed anyone but a sovereign, she has not the excuse of being a queen in her own right or the heir to a throne; and she at least could have refused Eucherius' suit firmly without the spiteful contempt which she continually exhibits towards him. When he tries to please her by furthering a royal marriage for her, she is not only miffed, like Eriphyle under analogous circumstances in Timocrate, that her lover is willing to give her up - a favorite situation with Thomas Corneille - but also furious that she should owe anything to him. ... She says that she treats Eucherius with such scorn because she hopes that on this account her brother will reward his great merits by sharing the Empire with him, to make him a fit husband for her; she says that Eucherius cannot have conspired to gain the throne in order to win her, because a love for her could never prompt anyone to do anything bad! It

35. Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 439.

36. Collins, Thomas Corneille, pp. 110, 112, 114, 112.

37. Nashville, 1958, p. 225.

is hard to imagine that this woman would confess to her confidante that she loves him, though by French-classical convention one tells one's confidante everything; it is utterly incredible that she would confess it to Eucherius himself, not when she believed him falsely accused of treason - then the confession would have been natural and good psychology - but when she has decided that he is guilty of it!

In fact, Placidie's portrayal is both consistent and interesting, for the character develops and her progress forms one of the basic structures on which the play depends. As such, it deserves a fairly close analysis. Now one has to admit that her conception of love, dominated by orgueil, seems strange, even ludicrous at times, and she has pride over and above the reticence which governs much acceptance of love by women in seventeenth-century French drama. But Placidie, as we saw when we looked at the basic structural pattern of the play, has an important part to play, and has a mighty enemy to face in the end, in the person of Stilicon. Her characteristics must make of her as large and exaggerated a character as the conspirator attempts to be.

Her two appearances in act I, in front of Honorius (scene 4) and then Stilicon himself (scene 5), show her to be adamant in refusing to publicly profess any feeling for Eucherius. But her reason is one of proud ambition, which for the moment outweighs the estime which she admits in both scenes to feeling for Stilicon's son. Unless he is in complete command, she cannot agree to Honorius and Thermantie's plan, for "Le faisant mon Epoux, en fais-je un Empereur?" (I.4). Her motives, then, appear to be exclusively self-centred: "Je ne prens interest qu'à ce

qui me regarde" (I.5). Act II, however, shows her in a different light, at least in the opening scene where she is alone with her confidante; and one must not be put off if, in the second scene, she rebuffs Euchérius at this, their first meeting in the play. The whole interest of the character is in her evolution, the way she moves from self-centred reticence to acceptance of Euchérius as a person, from orgueil revealed in public, denying any outward signs of love, to an outwardly-expressed love that conquers orgueil. Her last words in the play, after the death of Euchérius, sum up the change that has been wrought in the course of the action:

Je dois à sa chere Ombre une pleine vangeance.
 D'un trop superbe espoir le succès decevant
 Veut qu'il obtienne mort ce qu'il n'a pû vivant,
 Qu'avec éclat pour luy mon coeur toujours s'explique,
 Qu'ainsi que mon orgueil ma flame soit publique ... 38.

In private, then, with Lucile, she unburdens herself, here at the beginning of act II and again in act IV scene 1; with Euchérius in equally parallel scenes, II.2 and IV. 3. In the opening scene of the second act, her love is revealed to a surprised confidante, but only after Placidie has passed through three initial stages: a restatement of her first act position ("Je me dois le refus dont la fierté t'étonne"); a suspicion that Euchérius' love is not entirely genuine, that it "du plus beau feu s'imposant la contrainte, / En affecta les soins sans en sentir l'atteinte"; and a demand to know why Euchérius has suggested renouncing

her in favour of Alaric:

Quand il faut que l'Amour jusque-là se trahisse,
La revolte plaist mieux qu'un si grand sacrifice,
Et quelque dur revers dont l'on soit combatu,
C'est aimer lâchement qu'avoir tant de vertu. (II.1)

The love which she then expresses, going as it does against "De l'éclat de mon sang la jalouse fierté", is no longer restricted to the mind, but has reached her heart: "De l'erreur de mes sens mon coeur s'est fait complice". Her disdain is a proof of love, for she hopes that her refusal will induce Honorius to give power to Euchérius, as precedent allows. It is true that her argument proves her self-seeking nature, but the character is already more nuancé than in act I. Her first meeting with Euchérius in scene 2 adds further details ("A cause qu'on me cede on croit m'avoir aimée?"), and when he gives indications of his love ("Mais pour cesser d'aimer je dois cesser de vivre"), she says that "Jamais l'orgueil d'un Diadème / Relâche une Princesse à confesser qu'elle aime".

The final dismissal - "Sachant ce que je suis, aime sans esperer" - would seem to end Euchérius' hopes. But for the audience, knowledge of Placidie has been greatly increased, and it can be seen that the interview with Stillcon's son was at once a statement of position and a reaction against the admission of love of the previous scene, which was daring for Placidie. Taken in conjunction with her words to Lucile, it is clear that, cautious and demanding as she is, she does have considerable feeling for Euchérius, however hedged around it may be with restrictions (Her lapsing from vous to tu in the second half of scene 2 is an indication of this).

Her rôle, though, can only be judged as a whole, when the early appearances in act I and the beginning of act II are related to what happens in acts III and IV. And perhaps it is the audience, seeing her in both private and public, and not individuals like Honorius, Stilicon or Eucharis, who alone can understand what she is up to. In her own way, then, she fits well into a conspiracy play, where the audience is aware of most of Stilicon's actions, but where the characters themselves, in their own small worlds, can have no overall view of what his machinations are. Placidie's public reticence in the first two acts comes up against another obstacle in the second half of the play, for there Honorius has become suspicious of Eucharis and is no longer well disposed to him, as in the opening act. Placidie's attempt to realise and convey her true emotions thus meet with still greater difficulties - and it is against this that we must judge her remarks when she re-appears in the last scene of act III. However ludicrous her position may seem, it has altered from act I : what she says is halfway between a point-blank refusal of Eucharis and a full acceptance of him on her terms. Like Thermantie, she now learns of the accusation against Eucharis but despite this can say: " ... s'il m'aime en effet, il doit estre innocent" and "Qu'on me réponde en luy d'une amour veritable, / Je répondray qu'à tort vous le croyez coupable" (III.4). Her final remarks express the furthest point she has yet reached and leave Honorius speechless:

Quand j'auray par ma mort saoulé vostre vangeance,
D'Eucharis alors vous croirez l'innocence,

Et ferez vanité de ne plus déguiser
Que pour me perdre seule, on voulut l'accuser.

Placidie's appearance in the first four scenes of act IV presents the third and in some ways the most important stage in her development. As in II.1 she confides her thoughts to Lucile, using the clearest terms possible to show her faith in Euchérius:

Sa vertu que soutient l'éclat le plus insigne
D'un soupçon lâche & bas me l'a fait voir indigne,
Et pour en repousser l'ingurieux abus,
J'ay suivi de mon coeur le mouvement confus.
Ce coeur s'est attendri. (IV.1).

Her cries of "Mais il est innocent" and "Mais, Lucile, je l'aime" in the same scene confirm this. It may well be the news from Lucile that Félix has been arrested and charged with Zénon's murder that makes Placidie so certain of the first of the assertions; the second results from the first. In addition, her suspicions of Stilicon are now aroused (" .. je ne comprends point quel jaloux desespoir/ Imole Euchérius à son triste devoir") and this must strengthen her view. This new confidence is shattered by the news which immediately follows of Félix's denial, and her exclamation "Ah, le traistre" (IV.2) prepares the audience for a bitter interview between Euchérius and herself in scene 3. Yet this does not really occur ... Placidie is largely hostile - the tu here is derisory rather than sympathetic - but again it is seen that she needs time to work out her position and recover from the shock of scene two. Her closing words show, in fact, how far she has come from her last interview with Euchérius in act II. Then she had sent him off with a discouraging

"aime sans esperer", whereas now she leaves her options open: "Prouve ton innocence", she says to Euchérius,

Et si mes sentimens étonnent ta constance,
Songe que c'est beaucoup qu'un coeur comme le mien
Veuille, murmure, craigne, & ne resolve rien. (IV.3)

In fact her fears and lack of determination yield when, in front of Honorius in the following scene, she says of Euchérius: "Mais enfin pour sa gloire / Vous apprendrez qu'il m'aime, & que j'ose le croire". Now convinced of his love for her, and having succeeded in making a public declaration of it, Placidie's wish is fulfilled: the feeling can be reciprocated.

Act V of Stilicon provides a final, logical revirement before Placidie's fate can be sealed. The character's clearheadedness is brought out when, in scene 2, she realises that Félix, last mentioned in the opening scene of act IV, is in some way involved in Zénon's murder and should be brought to trial; yet he does not figure in Honorius' list of suspects (IV.5). Her mocking of Stilicon (V.2), which marks the start of his downfall, underlines her confidence in Euchérius' innocence, but, as in the previous act, Thomas Corneille has wished to test this faith by immediate news that throws doubt on Euchérius' innocence. Believing him to have assassinated Honorius, as the evidence might suggest he has, Placidie again utters the words "le traistre" (scene 3) - the same as she used in IV.2, when the young man appeared convicted by Félix's statement. Far from being a grotesque portrayal, as Collins would have us believe, Placidie, by the strength of her final involvement

in Euchérius' fortunes and her concern for his honour (even if it is primarily to satisfy her own pride), is surely a credible character, one who reacts cautiously to events and whom the rapid change of fortunes in the play leaves bewildered at moments such as this, in act V. Even so, she bides her time before condemning. In act IV she awaited the end of Marcellin's 30-line account in scene 3 before accusing Euchérius; now the reported cry of betrayal "Meure l'Empereur, & vive Eucherius" (V.3) is proof enough for her, and understandably so. She sees her trust betrayed, but even so is restrained in the attack she makes on him in her last speech in the scene.

The rehabilitation of Euchérius (scene 4) does not allow for much reaction on Placidie's part, for it is too closely followed by news of his death (scene 5). Her feelings are now made public, even in grief: her reticence she calls an "injuste refus" and she regrets that Honorius did not see that she really wanted Euchérius' position to be improved. Above all, she understands herself, her now conquered pride and the need to give expression, through tears, "devant tous", of the love she has always felt for the conspirator's son.

Now, it may seem inappropriate to call the development in Placidie active, but given her characteristics it is. No character in the play can keep up with the protagonist, not even his own confidant Mutian (III.4). Each person is working at his or her own speed, while Stilicon, with his double-dealing, is doing the work of two. This

hypocritical approach recalls others used by Thomas Corneille, by Timocrate in the play of that name and even by Camma, whose silence over Sostrate is not unlike Stilicon's. But Timocrate was not condemning his own son to die, nor will, indeed, the heroine of Camma. In Stilicon the dramatist has so arranged the sequence of events and contrasted characters' impressions of other characters in one scene and the next (Honorius in III.1 and III.3, Placidie in IV.1 and IV.2, and so on) that the protagonist has a virtually clear run, operating as a trickster in all but his interviews with Mutian.

Perhaps, indeed, Thomas Corneille has set Stilicon on too easy a path. The only surprises he receives are in II.5, when he learns of Zénon's betrayal, and in V.4, when Honorius, believed assassinated, walks in alive. He copes admirably with the first, while by the fifth act events are, unknown to him, beyond his control. We saw earlier how the decision to show the plotters (or at least two of them) on stage - in I.6, III.4 and V.1 - preconditions the audience to adjust to what Stilicon in particular says. The problem is to know how far this affects the inevitability which surrounds the lives of the other characters, in particular Euchérius and Honorius, with their in-

sistence on the rôle of le sort, le destin³⁹.

But this is not to say that the play lacks moments of tension or reversals of fortune. The one point where Thomas Corneille's grip may be said to slacken is when Eucherius accuses Zénon in II.3, for no immediately apparent reason. It is only later that this is seen to be a point which Honorius remembers and which, together with Zénon's letter sent to Eucherius' sister Thermantie, serves to strengthen the emperor's suspicions. Otherwise the play is consistent, creating incidents solely from the emotions of the characters present, and melodramatic scenes have been avoided; the detail of Zénon unable to name his assassin is brief but effective. Thomas has, at times, made good use of intervention by other characters, with scenes being prematurely cut off, as in act II, for example, where Honorius' arrival at the end of scene 2 prevents the Eucherius-Placidie dialogue from developing further, or in scene 5, where Stilicon's enthusiasm is kept within safe bounds by the return of Eucherius from his errand (scene 6).

39. Eucherius: un mépris dont le sort est complice, I.1; (le sort) qui m'accable, III.3; .. Si le Destin s'obstine à me calomnier./ Il a juré ma perte, & de sa violence,/ Je ne puis appeller qu'à ma seule innocence, ibid.; Mais quoi que contre moy le Sort ose par eux (the arrested conspirators),/ Mon crime ne sera que d'estre malheureux, IV.5.

Honorius: Et mon malheur est tel, que mon sort le plus doux/ Est d'avoir quelque lieu de douter entre vous, III.3; O rigueur du Destin à ma peine endurcy! ..., V.7.

Stilicon uses the same two terms (I.6, III.4 etc.), but in an altogether lighter vein, except when he complains in act I of Eucherius' inadequate status.

It is to the end of the acts in Stilicon that the dramatist has paid particular attention. All, without exception, contrive to end with Stilicon in a dominant position. The sixth scene of act I, as has already been noted, forms part of the direct conspiracy and contrasts with the Placidie story in the opening five. In the corresponding scene of act II, the protagonist comes to the aid of a doubtful Honorius with the suggestion that the guard be changed before Zénon's secret visit. By act III scene 4 he has so ingratiated himself with Honorius that he is put in charge of security and has to explain to a bemused confidant the purpose of his actions. It is Stilicon who comes in last to confront his son at the end of act IV and so ensure that the plan he has advanced until then is brought to its proper conclusion. As for the dénouement the words of V.6 show the title-character master of himself until the end, unhistorically taking his own life rather than accept punishment from another.

Stilicon's confession adds immeasurably to the tragic stature of the character, for to save his own life he had no need to reveal his conspiracy at this point; both Honorius and Placidie are taken by surprise. The play, indeed, could have ended with the death of Euchérius, Placidie's tears and Stilicon's triumph. His grief is further proof, if proof is needed, of the all-consuming ambition which drove him on to such desperate means and the complete failure of his plans. The amour paternel which

most critics speak of when describing him⁴⁰ pales in comparison with the glory he hopes that he will attain, far in excess of the consideration he already has by virtue of his daughter's marriage to Honorius.

Allied to mounting tension at the close of each act is the use which Thomas Corneille makes of the intervals. In examining earlier plays by him, we saw that important events could at times be consigned to the intervals, although most were of a nature which prevented their representation on stage or which did not need to be staged. In Stilicon, each interval is occupied in the furtherance of the direct conspiracy. In the first the meeting which Stilicon announces in I.6 is held and at some point during this time Zénon decides to defect. Between acts II and III Zénon is murdered and the guard is changed, as Stilicon suggested to Honorius. The third interval is the time when a number of the conspirators are rounded up; Honorius will give their names to Euchérius in IV.5. The interval before act V sees the preparation of the attack on the emperor by the remainder of the conspirators; Mutian relates the plan to Stilicon in the opening speech of the last act.

Now, little of this could have been brought to the stage, if Euchérius is to keep his major characteristic, innocence, and if Honorius is to be portrayed as an unsus-

40. E.g. Reynier, Thomas Corneille, p. 151; Lancaster, History, vol. III, p. 439; Collins, Thomas Corneille, p. 113.

pecting gullible emperor. The conspirators' meeting in the first interval, the round-up in the third and the assassination attempt on Honorius in the fourth involve too many characters, for one thing; Honorius mentions nine in IV.5 and this is only a portion of the group, for the emperor's account of Eucherius' valiant efforts (V.4) implies that there were a fair number then, too. Unable to represent many, Thomas Corneille wisely chooses to show none, leaving only Stilicon and his confidant, who have greater motives; even Zénon, the repentant conspirator, is not shown. Although the play contains seven récits in its thirty-one scenes - in addition to the four in act V already mentioned, there is Mutian's account of Zénon's death (III.3), Flavie's story about Félix (IV.1) and Marcellin's counter-version (IV.2) -, not all are simply used to inform the audience of what has been done in the intervals. The meeting of the conspirators and the changing of the guard are announced or suggested (I.6 and II.6), but there is no immediate follow-up account. Zénon's defection is left unexplained and the bringing-in of the conspirators after act III is only mentioned in passing in IV.5. On the other hand Zénon's murder in the second interval is followed by the récit in III.3, and the attack on Honorius in the last by the three accounts in V.3, 4 and 5. Of the other three récits, two (IV.1 and 2) serve to strengthen Stilicon's position, while the last (V.8) is an account of his death. A particularly interesting feature of Lucile's récit in IV.1 is that Thomas Corneille, to heighten the suspense, has had secrets of

the plot passed from confidant to confidante direct, for Lucile ends her second speech with "Voilà de Mutian ce que je viens d'apprendre".

By its content Stilicon must be a tragédie-crise. Both the conspiracy and Placidie's feelings are at a crucial stage in their development. Thomas Corneille has, however, insisted on the time-element, at least as far as the plot against Honorius is concerned. In the last scene of act I Stilicon indicates that the emperor must die "des cette nuit mesme", and that the conspirators should meet "dans une heure au plus tard". The unity of time, like that of place and of action, is easily kept. Despite the unforeseen events consequent upon Zénon's betrayal, Mutian indicates that the attempt has been brought forward: "Vous aviez bien lieu d'avancer un dessein, he assures Stilicon (V.1), Dont l'effet cette nuit pouvoit estre incertain".

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Early in February 1662, two years after Stilicon and a fortnight before Sertorius, Thomas Corneille brought out Maximian at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. His third tragedy from Imperial Rome, it fits into the period between Commode and Stilicon in the early years of the fourth century. The similarity between Maximian and the two earlier plays, particularly Stilicon, is very striking and, as we shall see from an examination of the historical sources, this is in large measure due to deliberate changes effected by the dramatist. Stilicon had been a success, and it seems

quite likely that Thomas decided to capitalise on this and wrote a tragedy round a similar theme. As so often in seventeenth-century France, it appears that it is the dramatic situation which must have started the dramatist off, and that he then looked around for a suitable historical subject to clothe the framework which he had in mind.

The story of the ex-emperor Maximian is recounted by Nicolas Caussin in his La Cour sainte, which had started to come out in Paris in 1624. Having withdrawn from power along with Diocletian, Caussin tells us in the second volume, Maximian did all he could to be accepted by his young successor Constantine:

... pour le lier davantage a soy, & cimenter tout à fait son affaire, il luy donne sa fille Fausta en mariage, que le ieune Prince espousa en secondes nopces ... Ces nopces de Fausta se passerent avec bien de la magnificence, & le gendre rendit tant d'honneur à son beau-pere, qu'il sembloit ne retenir de l'Empire que le nom & l'habit, partageant avec luy le reste de sa puissance.

But as this contact was not nearly sufficient for him, Maximian tries to go further:

... enfin il porta son dessein bien auant sur la fortune & sur la vie de Constantin: & comme il estoit vain à parler de ses entreprises, nommément à sa fille Fausta, qu'il estimoit de bon esprit, il s'ouurit si fort à elle, qu'il fit, comme dit le Sage, de ses levres le lacet de son ame. Car la ieune mariée, qui auoit plus d'amour à la personne de son mary qu'à celle de son pere, & qui ayant desia le goust de l'Empire, ne l'eust pas voulu quitter à celuy auquel elle deuoit sa naissance, alla tout declarer à Constantin, l'aduer-tissant qu'il prist bien garde à son beau-pere, & que c'estoit vn fort meschant esprit, qu'il tromperoit, s'il pouuoit, tous les Dieux de l'Olympe, pour le desir qu'il auoit de regner.

Maximian attempts to flee:

Mais il fut attrapé à Marseille, & là estranglé, pour mettre fin à sa vie, & à tous ses desseins. Les vns ont publié que luy-mesme se pendit par desespoir de ses

affaires. Les autres, que ce fut par le commandement de Constantin. D'autres ont dit, que son gendre (Constantin) l'eust bien voulu sauuer, mais la haine publique qu'on portoit à Maximian, preuint la clemence, ce que ie pense le plus probable⁴¹.

Among ancient historians who treat the incident Lactantius, in his De mortibus persecutorum, introduces an episode omitted by other contemporaries and by Caussin. The growth of Maximian's jealousy and hurt pride is recounted at length, his unsuccessful attempt to strip his son Maxentius of the purple (ch. XXVII), the foiling of his plan to kill the younger Maximian (ch. XXVIII) and the failure of his story that his successor Constantine was dead (*ibid.*). When Maximian confides in his daughter and Fausta reveals all to her husband, Constantine puts a eunuch in his bed. Maximian enters at night and kills the eunuch, believing him to be Constantine, but he is confronted by his intended victim. Left to select the manner of his death, he chooses to die by hanging (ch. XXIX).

A few decades later Eutropius, describing Maximian as a "man inclined to every kind of cruelty and severity, faithless, perverse and utterly void of consideration for others", provides the version adopted by Caussin in the seventeenth century, although with a slightly moralising tone at the end:

Herculius tamen Maximianus post haec (i.e. after the death of Severus at Ravenna) in contione exercitus filium Maxentium nudare conatus seditionem et convicia militum tulit. Inde ad Gallias profectus est dolo composito, tamquam a filio esset expulsus, ut Constantino genero

41. N. Caussin, La Cour sainte, Paris, D. Bechet, 1664, vol. II, p. 48.

iungeretur, moliens tamen Constantinum reperta occasione interficere, qui in Galliis et militum et provincialium ingenti iam favore regnabat caesis Francis atque Alamannis captisque eorum regibus, quos etiam bestiis, cum magnificum spectaculum muneris parasset, obiecit. Detectis igitur insidiis per Faustam filiam, quae dolum viro nuntiaverat, profugit Hercules Massiliaeque, oppressus (ex ea enim navigare⁴² ad filium praeparabat) poenas dedit iustissimo exitu⁴².

Zosimus, omitting the eunuch episode, shows Fausta to be as faithful to the emperor as the Fausta of Lactantius, but he has Maximian die, not in Marseille, but in Tarsus⁴³. He, like Lactantius, though, shows Maximian's son Maxentius later up in arms against Constantine, looked on as his father's murderer and eager to revenge the blood shed.⁴⁴ Finally, Orosius, understandably emphasising Maximian's persecution of the Christians, brings the scene of Maximian's demise back to Marseille but leaves the manner of death unspecified, although suicide is ruled out:

Herculius Maximianus, persecutor et ex Augusto tyrannus, confirmatum iam in imperio filium ueste ac potestate regia spoliare conatus, conuiciis autem ac tumultibus militum palam conterritus in Galliam profectus est, ut Constantino genero aequae dolis iunctus auferret imperium. sed per filiam deprehensus et proditus, deinde⁴⁵ in fugam uersus Massiliae oppressus et interfectus est⁴⁵.

It can be seen that the sources from which Thomas Corneille could have drawn his material in Maximian vary

42. Eutropi Breviarum ab urbe condita, book X, ch. 3, recognovit F. Ruehl, Leipzig, 1887, pp. 71-72.

43. Zosimus, book II, ch. II; ed. cit., p. 76.

44. Lactantius, De mortibus persecutorum, ch. XL, Paris, E. Belin, 1888, pp. 58-60. Cf. Zosimus, book II, ch. 14; ed. cit., p. 78.

45. Orosius, book VII, ch. 28; ed. cit., p. 271.

only in detail. The events preceding the former emperor's last bid to regain control are strictly irrelevant, for the play concentrates on this final incident and there is less insistence than in many other tragedies of the time on past incidents brought to the audience's attention in the exposition. Maximian compresses the account of his feelings after abdication into a few lines of his dialogue with Martian in I.3:

C'est qu'un indigne exemple ait pû trop sur mon ame,
 Quand Diocletian m'inspira le dessein
 De quitter comme luy le pouvoir souverain.
 Séduit par ses conseils j'abandonnay l'Empire,
 Et quand à leur foiblesse on m'a trop veu souscrire,
 Le crime sera beau s'il peut me racheter
 La honteuse vertu qui me le fit quitter.

From history Thomas has taken over the idea of the complex relationship between Maximian, Constantin and Fauste and Maximian's plot against the emperor, his son-in-law. But he has turned Fauste into a quite different woman, one less moved by a sense of duty to reveal the conspiracy to Constantin, keener to maintain a silence as long as possible - until the very end of play, in fact. Three characters, who do not figure in the historical account of events immediately leading up to Maximian's death, are associated with it in Thomas' tragedy. Severus, whom Maximian invested with the purple in 305 and who was asked to put down his son Maxentius' revolt in the following year, is brought in, although in reality he was killed three years before the events of the play, and is given an important though thankless rôle as former lover of Fauste. The historical characters Licinius and Con-

stantia, the latter sister of the emperor Constantine, are also added. We learn from Zosimus that the two became engaged a year or a year and a half after Maximian's death in 310 and were eventually married at Milan in 313⁴⁶. In the play they are lovers and will marry at the end; but Licine is also involved with Sévère, for the emperor, suspecting, and rightly so, that the latter is still in love with his wife, intends to give him Constance in marriage.

Now, although the introduction of events historically prior to and following the main incident chosen for dramatisation is quite normal, it may be that Thomas Corneille introduced Sévère here in order to create a second Eucharis. Fauste, as Maximian's daughter and Constantin's wife, occupies in some ways the crucial position in the action; yet Sévère, too, believed by Maximian to be conspiring with him, but in fact aware of the danger and revealing details to Fauste herself, is equally vulnerable. Maximian's position, as a trusted adviser of Constantin, is similar to that of the historical and dramatised Stilicon, rather than of the historical Maximian of 310. Like Stilicon, Maximian will commit suicide, and although Caussin at least suggests that this is a historical possibility (but no more), the manner of his death is the same as that of the protagonist in the 1660 play.

The eunuch scene in Lactantius' account provides a colourful and dramatic moment; at a pinch it could have

46. Zosimus, book II, ch. 17; ed. cit., p. 81.

been acted out on stage, but Camma in the previous year, to say nothing of Amalasonte a few years before, had probably gone as far as a stabbing could be taken by a dramatist, and the foiled attempts in these plays left Thomas with little chance to do better without appearing to be imitating both a rival, Quinault, and himself. Yet Maximian's intention to murder Constantin in bed, although without the eunuch, is indeed brought in, for we learn in act V from the emperor that "La nuit favorisant ce qu'il (Maximian) veut hazarder, /Jusque dans mon lit mesme il doit me poignarder" (scene 1), repeated in scene 7, while in his interview with Constantin (scene 3), the over-eager conspirator suggests that, for safety's sake, "Je passeray la nuit dans vostre appartement". It would seem, then, that Th. Corneille used Lactantius' account, and possibly that of Caussin for the dénouement, although the manner of Maximian's suicide is changed and follows that of Stilicon two years earlier.

The six main characters, then - Constantin, Fauste, Maximian, Sévère, Constance and Licine - have a basis in fact, although three have been brought in to complete the incident of Maximian's plotting and death. What minor figures there are play a small part. The two confidantes Flavie and Lucie cease to appear before the end of act II, Martian, Maximian's crony, is present in only three scenes in act I and one in act III, while Maxime, the Imperial capitaine des gardes, appears in seven scenes spread throughout the five acts. The absence of confidantes in

the last three acts is particularly noticeable and throws light on the manner in which Thomas Corneille has constructed his tragedy, uniting, as in Stilicon, a love plot to a political conspiracy, although doing so in a rather different way.

For the dramaturgical problem set by Maximian is quite different from that which Thomas faced two years before with Stilicon. As history reveals little about Stilicho's plotting, so it insists on the determination of the ex-emperor Maximian to regain power - not for another or for himself, via another, as with the Vandal general, but from purely selfish motives. In Stilicon, Thomas Corneille succeeded in keeping his conspiracy largely off-stage, creating three levels of action of which the active plotting was the least emphasised. Stilicon appears in only eight of the twenty-three scenes of the first four acts, one fewer than Placidie even, and virtually half Honorius' total of fifteen. In all, the protagonist is on stage for less than half the play. Not so in the 1662 tragedy. Constantin the emperor is beaten into third place by the title-character, who occupies twenty of the thirty scenes, with his daughter Fauste present in seventeen, Constantin in fourteen, Constance in eleven and Sévère in only nine. In addition the pattern of distribution is radically different. All the five main figures in Stilicon appeared in at least two of the opening act's six scenes and again, except for Thermantie, in act II. We saw how for seven scenes (II.3 to III.3 inclusive) the

stage was held by male characters; but otherwise the exposition and the noeud contain a fair spread of characters. The first act of Maximian, on the other hand, does not introduce Constantin or Constance, who then appear in act II, while Fauste, like Stilicon's Thermantie, is off-stage. In the last three acts, it is Fauste and Maximian who occupy the dominating positions, along with the emperor. While Thermantie made three appearances, Fauste makes fourteen and Maximian one more, with a break of only two scenes from II.2 onwards. Constance, too, after only one appearance in acts III and IV, is present throughout act V, and every main character turns up here, Sévère in scene 5 and Licine in the seventh and last scene.

Stilicon's end-of-act stealth and behind-the-scenes activity gives way to Maximian's open plotting. And Fauste, unlike Thermantie, is present along with her husband Constantin during most, though not all, of these scenes in the last three acts. The conspiracy and Fauste's attempt to remain silent, and maintain a balance between her father and her husband become the main themes of the tragedy: the love plot is reduced in proportion. The history of Sévère's love for Fauste and her attitude to him is dealt with rapidly: the two characters only meet twice alone, in I.6 where Sévère reveals his feelings in full, and in III.1, where interest is centred on Sévère's revelation of Maximian's plans. It is the same with Licine and Constance: their relationship is dealt with in a number of scenes where one or neither is present (I.1, II.1, II.2, II.3), but the

couple only meet once in the first four acts, in II.4. Similarly, Constance only meets Sévère once, in the very short following scene.

This change of emphasis is, as we shall see, largely but not entirely beneficial, for it concentrates interest in the attempt to overthrow the emperor without the need to introduce a love-element or a counter-offensive, similar to that launched by Honorius to discover Zénon's murderer and the identity of his own potential assassin. But there remain a large number of points of comparison between Stilicon and Maximian, so much so that Maximian's small success can be largely attributed to the public's dissatisfaction with mere repetition.

In both plays the plotter's daughter is married to the emperor, and Stilicon and Maximian, though for slightly different reasons, wish to assassinate their fathers-in-law. The emperor's sister in each case is in love, and both men concerned come under suspicion by the emperor, due to the protagonists' attacks on them. In Stilicon this incident is made more poignant by Euchérius' relationship to Stilicon, while in Maximian the accusations against Licine are supplemented by those against Sévère, who has no parallel in the earlier tragedy. In each play the emperor is for long unaware of what is going on behind his back and indeed entrusts his safety to the chief conspirator (Stilicon II.6 and especially act III; Maximian III.6). In the end the protagonists are forced into a corner and commit suicide, but not without causing bloodshed: Zénon's

murder and Eucherius' gallant demise in defence of Honorius are mirrored in the assassination of Sévère.

While the broad outlines are then remarkably similar, the plays vary significantly in details. Where Stilicon's careful approach kept most of the characters, even his confidant - and perhaps some of the audience - in the dark about what was going on, Maximian's openness and his bad tactical error in seeking help from Sévère, means that characters are progressively enlightened, until in act V Maximian is the last to believe that his plot is hidden and that he will succeed. In Stilicon the audience is made aware of the conspiracy in the last scene of act I, but even later it may have doubts about its progress, necessitating Stilicon's whispered words with Mutian at the end of act III and the confident assertions of V.1. If Honorius and perhaps Placidie pierce the mystery of Zénon's assassin, they soon forget about it, and in any case is Zénon's murderer the man who is wishing to depose the emperor? In Maximian the confidant Martian is aware of what is happening from the very beginning (I.3); Sévère receives the conspirator's confidences and request for help in act II scene 6; Fauste is told all in the next scene (III.1), and Constantin is apprised of the facts by Martian between acts IV and V. Only Constance and Licine have to await Maximian's confession in the last scene of the play to be enlightened. In Licine's absence it is Sévère who faces accusations (IV.3) and although, unlike Eucherius, he knows of the conspirator's plans, his counter-

arguments are no more believed. Fauste's rôle in acts III, IV and V is one of avoiding contact with either husband or father and she manages this skilfully until the very end. Constantin's knowledge of the plot comes much later than Sévère's or Fauste's, making his appearances with Maximian in the last act resemble a game of cat and mouse.

The exposition of Maximian is spread over a longer period than that of Stilicon and really concludes only at the end of act II, when Maximian invites Sévère to join his conspiracy. Into these two acts is largely compressed the love plot. It is the question of who - Licine or Sévère - will marry Constance that sets the play in motion, and it is the Constance-Sévère meeting in II.5 which ends the section. Only after the audience is made aware of past and present pressures on Fauste, Licine and Sévère can Maximian be allowed to come into contact with more than one of these at a time and with the emperor Constantin, for his plans depend on a ruthless use of the feelings which exist or existed between these three characters. During these two opening acts both Sévère and Fauste and Licine and Constance have the opportunity for a longish meeting (I.6 and II.4 respectively) and it is appropriate that the latter scene should be immediately followed by an interview between Constance and Sévère, where Sévère, rebuffed by Fauste (I.6), is coolly received by Constance (II.5), who assures him only of her hand, not her love. It is at this juncture, when Sévère, as Martian predicted (I.3), sees

little hope for himself, that Maximian's offer (scene 6) could, to a weaker man, have appeared attractive.

The whole gamut of permutations is systematically covered before this point is reached, and the characters are well delineated. Licine's love for Constance (I.1) and the rivalry of Sévère are left in suspense when the young man is summoned to Constantin's presence (I.2). We only learn of the outcome of this meeting in II.1. Fauste and her feelings for Sévère occupy the last two scenes (5 and 6) of act I, and in a way a solution is found for each in the first scene of act II when the emperor orders Sévère's marriage to Constance. Constance then makes her first appearance, meeting in turn her brother, her lover and finally the man destined to marry her. In each of the acts, then, the sentimental action progresses towards a climax (I.6 and II.5). But the clarifications and rivalries on this score are interrupted, as in Stilicon, by the first of the scenes of active plotting (I.3), which allows the audience to settle its attitude to Maximian well in advance of the moment when even the first of the major characters, Sévère, sees through him (II.6). Although Maximian will twice overreach himself - here and in IV.6 with Fauste, whom he believes ignorant of his conspiracy - the plot against Constantine is at the same time a very personal and private affair.

Tout mon but est le Trône, he says, & pour y parvenir,
 Les chemins les plus seurs me plaisent à tenir.
 Ne dy point que l'éclat à ma gloire est contraire,
 Ce scrupule n'est bon qu'à quelque ame vulgaire. (I.3),

while much play is made of the secrecy surrounding the

identity of the leader who, thanks to Martian, becomes a charismatic figure for the other conspirators:

Leur soupçon jusqu'à vous est bien loin de s'étendre,
Puisque pour l'empescher j'ay soutenu d'abord
Qu'à nostre seureté nous devons vostre mort ... (*ibid.*)

It is this secrecy that Maximian puts over to Sévère in II.6, it is to this and this alone that Sévère pretends to agree then ("Mais qu'en vous trahissant j'expose vostre vie, / A tout ce qui rendroit sa vengeance assouvie, / Connoissez mieux Severe ...") and as the continuation of the play and the development of the conspiracy depend on Maximian's belief in Sévère's acceptance - for Sévère alone can answer for the army's loyalty -, the interplay of discretion and boldness, of public declarations and private agreements must go on.

The third and fourth acts contain the essential part of the conspiracy, Maximian's accusations against Licine (III) and the more important Sévère (IV), with Fauste, as soon as she is apprised of the true situation, opening and closing this central section in interviews with Maximian (III.2; IV.5). From the tense meeting in the first of these two scenes, where Fauste is under extreme pressure, interest is moved to Licine, who talks of a plot, and to Constantin, who arrives in his turn (III.4). Fauste's uncertainty is revealed when she addresses Licine ("Et l'Empereur, Licine", III.3) and again, very briefly, in front of her husband ("On conspire, Seigneur", scene 4; "Juste Ciel!", scene 5), but otherwise, in the major confrontation between Maximian, Constantin and Licine, accused by Martian

(scene 5), and in the last scene with her father and husband, she can do nothing. Martian's self-accusations here prefigure those of his master in IV.4, and with Constantin's anger aroused, Licine is as surely condemned as Sévère will be. The task of Stilicon, who had no confidant and did all the dirty work himself, is divided among Martian, who now disappears from the scene, and Maximian, who capitalises on Constantin's uncertainties ("En l'estat où je suis je ne sçay que vous dire", III.6) and, although momentarily frustrated by Fauste, who sweeps aside the problem of a change of guard, pushes on to victory over Sévère in act IV.

Far from being a period of rest, as we have seen occurs in many plays of the time, act IV is a busy one for Maximian, present in every scene. The act is classically constructed, showing the protagonist in conversation with Constance (scene 1), Sévère (scene 2), Constantin and Sévère (scene 3), the latter two and Fauste (scene 4) and finally alone with his daughter Fauste (scene 5) where, believing his victory complete, he confides his conspiracy to her. But not knowing that Sévère is aware of his plans, he only takes second place to Constantin in accusing him. The letter which the emperor has intercepted acts as a first proof against Sévère ("Lâche, dans ce billet reconnois-tu ta main?") and once this news has had time to sink in, Maximian can attack in his turn ("Cesse de t'obstiner,/ Si tu n'as pour témoins que les Dieux à donner") and extend his remarks to include Fauste. Both now, in IV.4, face the situation that confronted Licine in the previous act (III.5).

After considerable doubts ("Je pourrois parler où je cherche à me taire", IV.3), Sévère is goaded into accusing Maximian and excupating Licine (sc. 4), while Fauste, despite her father's self-accusations, manages to limit herself to ambiguous generalities. Constantin, understandably in view of his lack of knowledge, condemns Sévère, less for conspiring than because, as he tells his wife, "de mon amour osant braver l'ardeur,/ Quand j'obtiens vostre main, il garde vostre coeur". Fauste is as helpless as Sévère when she faces her father in scene 5, for as Maximian rightly claims "Malgré vous je me vois le maistre de mon crime".

With Constantin informed during the last interval of the play, the dénouement must concern itself more with ripping off Maximian's mask of innocence than with enlightenment of major characters who still have a bearing on events. Constance reappears for the first time since her discussion with Maximian about Licine in IV.1 and her act in having released him from prison - only one of a number of important incidents crammed into the last interval - foreshadows his reappearance in the last scene of the play. Until then Maximian's confession is withheld; but with the dying Sévère accusing Maximian of conspiracy and at the same time clearing Fauste's name, Constantin presses his charges, his father-in-law parries them, accusing Licine and invoking Martian's name. When he sees that the game is up, his final words are brief and his suicide on stage carried out with courage and not a little aplomb (V.7). Fauste has succeeded in maintaining her attitude of silence

right to the end, although showing her humanity in that last scene by begging for clemency for her father.

Like critics of Stilicon, Voltaire was impressed by Thomas' dramaturgical skill in Maximian, while regretting the restricted nature of the love plot. "Au milieu de tant de ressorts et d'incidents", he wrote in 1738 to Nicolas Claude Thieriot, "les passions n'ont pas leurs coudées franches". Yet "il est vrai que ce Thomas intriguait ses pièces comme un Espagnol. On ne peut pas nier qu'il n'y ait beaucoup d'invention et d'art dans son Maximien, aussi bien que dans Camma, Stilicon, Timocrate"⁴⁷. A few weeks earlier he had written in similar vein, with more details, to another correspondent: "Fausta se trouve dans cette pièce entre son mari & son père: ce qui produit des situations fort touchantes. Le complot est très intrigué & c'est une de ces pièces dans le goût de Camma & de Timocrate. Elle eut beaucoup de succès dans son temps; mais elle est tombée dans l'oubli, avec presque toutes les pièces de Thomas Corneille, parce que l'intrigue trop compliquée ne laisse pas aux passions le temps de paraître .."⁴⁸.

Now if a development of the sentimental plot such as that found in Stilicon does not occur in Maximian, this may,

47. Letter of Voltaire to Nicolas Claude Thieriot, 8 March 1738 in Voltaire's Correspondence, ed. T. Besterman, Geneva, 1954, letter 1406, vol. VII, pp. 111, 110.

48. Letter of Voltaire to Berger, c. 12 February 1738, letter 1389, ibid., p. 71. Voltaire ends by criticising Thomas' versification and the lack of "éloquence".

at least for us and from a dramatic point of view, be no bad thing. Stilicon's unity was maintained, although precariously and despite the presence of Placidie with her emotional development, such as it is. The Licine-Constance and Sévère-Fauste relationships are little more than motivations for Maximian's plotting; and Constantin makes no secret of the fact that his desire to give Sévère to Constance is aimed at ridding Marseille of a character whom he regards, perhaps rightly, as a rival for his wife's affections. What of Thomas' skill in putting Maximian together for the stage?

Almost always, within each individual act, he has succeeded in arranging his scenes in such a way that the entry of characters is effected with dramatic swiftness and the ends of acts are marked by a heightening of tension. In act I, for example, Fauste's remarks about Sévère (I.5) are immediately followed by the character's arrival, to Fauste's consternation ("Mais Dieux!"). Two acts later, when Fauste has just learned from Sévère about her father's conspiracy (III.1), Maximian appears (III.2) and Fauste, abandoned by Sévère, is left to deal with a tricky situation. Or again in act IV Maximian's words to Sévère about the conspiracy (scene 2) are followed by the arrival of the intended victim (scene 3). The tension inherent in such appearances is increased for the audience and some of the characters who progressively learn of Maximian's treason.

The end of the act is, as we have seen elsewhere, a point to which Thomas, like Pierre, seems to have given

special attention. Act I of Maximian closes with Sévère's admission of love to Fauste, counterbalancing Licine's remarks about Constance in the opening scene and contrasting with the scene of active plotting between Maximian and Martian in the middle of the act. The conspiracy scene in Stilicon's exposition had come at the end of act I, a direct result of Placidie's refusal to show interest in Eucherius. The order there was logical; but in Maximian the single character Eucherius is replaced by Licine and Sévère, and Thomas has disposed his first act in a way which brings out the full force of the two men's feelings and their consequent effect on the conspiracy. The last scene of act II is more obviously dramatic, for here Sévère learns what Maximian is up to and realises the earnestness of his commitment, for, as Maximian tells him when he believes Sévère to be on his side, "Il (the result of our plot) assure à mes vœux ou le Trône, ou la mort" (II.6).

The closing scenes of acts III and IV both involve Fauste. Act III scene 6 is her only scene alone with her father and her husband, and coming at the end of the act in which she has learned of Maximian's treachery, it requires delicate but firm handling. Of the two speeches which Constantin hears, the second shows how, present throughout this act, Fauste is quick, despite her difficult situation, to put paid to Maximian's plan to change the guard. Her interview with her father in IV.5 follows on his successful accusation of Sévère. Fauste here has to pretend that she is learning of the conspiracy for the

first time, although both in this scene and in her previous interview with Maximian (III.2), she was aware of the truth. Finally, as we have noted, Thomas Corneille manages to postpone the death of Maximian until the end of the last scene of the play, and indeed that scene, V.7, deals with several other loose strands of the action which need to be tied up before the dénouement can be complete.

Like Stilicon, Maximian is a play without monologues, a play of action; and as the 1660 tragedy made important use of intervals, so in 1662. Each of the intervals contains elements of the action, and at least one - the last interval - is indispensable from this point of view. In the gap between acts I and II, Constantin sees Licine about his love for Constance, as foreshadowed in I.2, when the emperor summons Licine into his presence. This is the only tête-à-tête between the two men in the play. In the second interval Sévère goes with Maximian to hear details of the plot from Martian ("De tout par Martian je me suis fait instruire", III.1) and finally resolves to betray the conspiracy, the first revelation being to Fauste on stage in the opening scene of act III. After act III Constantin surprises Fauste with a letter from Sévère; Fauste and Sévère had agreed in III.1 to use this as their only contact in future, except in emergencies, and the present letter is warning the emperor that Maximian has succeeded in arming the arrested conspirators whom Straton had denounced, as Maximian will himself recount to Sévère in IV.2. Constantin arrives with the letter in IV.3 and as IV.1 and 2 are rela-

tively short scenes, it is almost certain that the discovery takes place during the interval.

The most hectic of the four intervals is undoubtedly the last one. During this, Constance frees Licine in order to quell a public uprising; Martian has been released by one Valère on Maximian's orders, but Valère defects and delivers Martian to Constantin, who thus learns of the plot against him; and Sévère is stabbed by order of Maximian. Constance's action is almost traditional in tragedies of the time and often, as here, serves little direct purpose: Licine is brought into act V and his future with Constance secured, but this would have happened anyway, in the course of events. Sévère's assassination provides final proof, if proof is needed, of Maximian's diabolical jealousy, but Sévère dies before Maximian's confession and his passing evokes no repentance such as that which Stilicon is trying to formulate just before his own suicide. The rôle of Valère, however, can only be seen as a deus ex machina sent to resolve a dilemma which Thomas Corneille has all too successfully created by the end of act IV. It is true that Straton had defected earlier (III.3 and 4), but Valère has not been mentioned before, and his action is too vital to the play to be easily accepted. At best one can say that the atmosphere of conspiring and stealth which surrounds Stilicon and Maximian favours the emergence of such characters.

Apart from this intrusion of an unannounced character, the use of the intervals is limited to essentials, and the

action of the play as a whole is unified. The unities of time and place, too, are observed, for Thomas Corneille has brought all the action to Marseille. The one chance item - Constantin's interception of Sévère's letter - is not improbable in the circumstances, and Thomas has been careful to point out this possible means of communication between Fauste and Sévère in the first scene of the third act, when both fear the success of Maximian's plans⁴⁹.

Dramatic interest, aroused by the intercepted warning, is also found elsewhere in the play. In III.4, for example, Maximian is unsure whether his plot has been discovered by Constantin. But whereas in Stilicon the title-character suffers from the same doubts because of the suddenness of Honorius' announcement (II.5), Maximian here is in part prepared for Constantin's news by what Licine says in III.3:

Mais sur divers avis qui sembloient l'alarmer,
Seul avec Straton on l'a veu s'enfermer.
Il a mandé Maxime ...
Vous sçavez ceux déjà qu'il a fait arrester ...

Then Maximian's various attempts to have the guard changed raise the question of how near success he is. Sévère warns Fauste in III.1 that her father may try this ploy, as indeed he does in the next scene, but when she hedges, Maximian brings it up with Constantin in III.6, only to see Fauste get in first and assure him that "Seigneur, je prendray soin des jours de l'Empereur". In the last act, when he

49. This letter performs a different function from that of Zénon, sent to Honorius via Thermantie in Stilicon. The message in Zénon's was a straightforward warning, couched in necessarily general terms.

overreaches himself, he complains about the unchanged guard and suggests that to protect Constantin he will spend the night in the Imperial quarters (V.3). It may be that the idea of the change of guard, which is not in the historical accounts of Lactantius, Zosimus or Caussin, comes from Stilicon, where in II.6 Stilicon tells Honorius that Zénon is suspect:

Vos Gardes par ses (Zénon's) soins se trouveront gagnez.
Ne luy donnez point lieu de vous pouvoir surprendre ...
Faites changer la Garde avant que de le voir;
Ostez à son espoir ce moyen de vous nuire ...

The openness of approach which distinguishes Maximian from Stilicon and dictates the arrangement of events in the play also affects the overall impression left at the end. Stilicon misjudges Euchérius, and the son's loyalty, together with other details such as Thermantie's intervention and the strengthening of the guard round Honorius, leads to the conspirator's downfall. Faced with the ruin of his plans, Stilicon gains new stature from the regret he expresses just prior to suicide. In other respects - and these must seem minor in comparison to the intended elevation of Euchérius - Stilicon's plans are carried out with great skill and secrecy. Maximian, on the other hand, lays his cards more openly on the table, so that not only Martian, but Sévère and Fauste are in the know before the middle of the play. He misjudges Sévère, whose love for Fauste does not affect his sense of duty to Constantin once he, Sévère, learns of the conspiracy in act II. Maximian also misjudges Fauste, by revealing his project to her in what he thinks is his moment of triumph (IV.6). The fact that, un-

known to him, Fauste has been aware for two acts of what her father is plotting to do cannot reduce the weight of this tactical blunder. Yet perhaps Maximian's greatest mistake is seen in the two curious decisions he comes to after this meeting with Fauste. He commits the error of wanting to free Martian - a confidant whose release seems far from vital at this juncture - and of using to do this a man, Valère, who, it turns out, is no more faithful than Straton. Secondly he deals in melodramatic fashion with Sévère, having him stabbed three times. Is this a necessary outcome of what the emperor had decided in IV.4 or of what Maximian declared gloatingly to Fauste in the following scene?

Il perira, le Traistre (Constantin had said), & ma
 rage secrete
 Du moins par son trépas se verra satisfaite;
 Non que dans l'attentat il puisse estre accusé
 Que d'avoir sçu le crime, & l'avoir déguisé ...
 Pour moy, quelques ennuis où mon coeur soit plongé,
 Si Severe est puny, je suis assez vangé. (IV.4)

Earlier in that same scene Sévère has, for the first time, directly accused Maximian of conspiring, and the conspirator, in self-defence, has expressed his "surprise" and invoked the "éclat de ma vie". In the last scene of the act, justifiably affirming his all-powerfulness, Maximian declares to Fauste:

Vous craindray-je plus que je n'ay fait Severe?
 Après que son rapport n'a pu trouver de foy,
 Pour empescher sa perte agissez contre moy,
 Declarez mes desseins, accusez qui l'opprime.
 Malgré vous je me vois le maistre de mon crime,
 Et sa mort me va mettre en estat de jouir
 De la pleine douceur d'avoir osé trahir.
 Mais enfin de sa peine il est temps qu'on ordonne,
 Vous sçavez le pouvoir que l'Empereur me donne,
 J'en sçauray bien user. (IV.5)

Is his bungled attempt to dispose of Sévère mere obedience to Constantin's command? Is he, despite what he says here, afraid of Sévère? Can one take at face value his explanation in V.7 that "Son sang à ma vengeance a servy de victime"? Or has his confident belief in final victory merely carried him away? Certainly, Thomas Corneille has arranged events in act V in such a way that Maximian can fight gamely and blindly until the very last scene, then admit defeat and rapidly commit suicide, with no hint of repentance.

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From our study of Thomas Corneille's plays in the three preceding chapters, ranging as they do from Timocrate and Bérénice through Darius and Commode to Stilicon, Camma and Maximian, three major facts emerge. Firstly, the important part played by physical identity in the first three of the plays mentioned gives way, as early as La Mort de l'empereur Commode, to a more sophisticated treatment of feelings. The early plays depend very largely on mistaken identity and the succession of dramatic situations to which this can give rise. But gradually, between Commode and Maximian, Thomas Corneille abandons physical disguise and treats hidden emotions instead - not just love, as in Stilicon's Placidie, although this is important and, in that play, acts as a justification for the father's further actions, but other emotional states, such as jealousy, ambition, revenge. Timocrate hid himself in the person of Cléomène and vice-versa; Stilicon will conceal his true

nature and his actual plans from Honorius, as Maximian will for long succeed in doing, while Camma remains silent with regard to Sostrate. This radical change of direction, where the emphasis moves from externals (physical identity) to internal factors (psychological motivations) is accomplished within a remarkably short space of time and, as I have tried to show, with little or no loss in the level of dramatic tension, thanks to a skilfully handled range of dramaturgical devices. Not only does Thomas Corneille make a great personal success of this transformation; on the contemporary theatrical scene he plays a leading part in carrying it through. The comparison of Commode and Quinault's Amalasonte in the late 50s shows the difference already reached at that point in time, and a comparison between Stilicon or Maximian and, say, Boyer's Oropaste (1662) would show that, however technically skilful Boyer is, and however well he manages to create and maintain suspense, his tragedy is inferior to the two slightly earlier ones by Thomas Corneille, not only in execution but in the very conception. Oropaste ou le faux Tonaxare: the title of this well-known play reveals clearly enough that mistaken identity is still present and although history (Herodotus and Justin) provide him with the basic facts, Boyer adds further picturesque extraneous details. Oropaste is supposed to have been drowned in a bridge collapse but in fact survives; the love plot is greatly strengthened by the introduction of Araminte (sister of the real Tonaxare) who, along with Oropaste/Tonaxare, has

the most important rôle in the play⁵⁰. Oropaste is exactly contemporary, too, with Quinault's tragi-comedy Agrippa roy d'Albe ou le faux Tibérinus, where again the problem of physical identity takes precedence over the study of feelings.

A second important feature of these six or seven plays of Th. Corneille which we have been looking at in greater or lesser detail is related to what I have just said. The straight tragedies, at least, if not the more romanesque of the plays, are studies in ambition, given dramatic expression on stage through a struggle for power. As I have tried to point out, the nature of the ambition changes: Marcia's desire for power is in many respects a half-hearted affair, for she is soon persuaded by the evidence that marriage to Commode would be less pleasant than she fondly believes and indeed dangerous. Stilicon's ambition is largely personal, but is reflected through concern for his son - or so he says - and we have to wait for Sinorix and especially Maximian to see the lust for power at its most obvious. Marcia's ambition, even more Stilicon's, is a confident one, unassailed by major doubts; the hero of the 1660 tragedy, in particular, carries all before him and acts alone. His downfall is all the more of a

50. Hésione's name, invented by Boyer, as historical accounts reveal little about Cyrus' daughter, may well come from Th. Corneille's Camma, played some 22 months before Oropaste. From Camma, too, Boyer may have taken the suggestion that Oropaste, the usurper, has been king for six months when the play opens (cf. Camma, I.1, where Sinorix, another usurper, says: "Depuis six mois je regne, & regne sans obstacles").

shock to him and, as we have seen, he becomes a truly tragic character after the death of Eucharis. For Thomas Corneille it is as if this realisation of guilt, at the end of the play, opened up a new conception of the tragic character. His Sinorix in the following year is a prey to doubts and his Maximian in 1662, although unrepentant and in some respects stronger than Stilicon, is, however, dependent - he needs Sévère and Sévère's refusal to be a party to his plot is the direct cause of his downfall.

In both of these important fields, then - the interiorisation of feeling to replace external physical disguise and the creation of a dependent, although apparently active hero of limited powers, perhaps eventually aware of his limitations -, Thomas Corneille can be seen to be not only in advance of his contemporaries among the so-called "secondary authors" but to be clearly foreshadowing Racine. For the latest of the plays mentioned so far, Maximian, was performed over two years before La Thébaine appeared on the stage of the Palais-Royal.

My third point is that the shift in the conception of the tragic character required from Thomas the dramaturgical skill and dramatic devices which have been mentioned in the course of the last three chapters. The main feature of the plays in the early 1660s as compared with Timocrate, Bérénice or even Commode, is a general simplification, together with an improvement in construction. The action, becoming internal, is reduced in quantity, although not thereby oversimplified, and as a rule different elements

in a play - the intermingling of love and conspiracy, for example - are better handled as time proceeds. Certainly the integration of elements into the overall structure is much more successfully accomplished in Stilicon and Camma than in Commode, and if Maximian, with its love plot largely confined to the first two acts, seems like a step backwards, we must remember the difficulties of composing a second play so similar to Stilicon two years earlier and can, perhaps, forgive.

Even his most grudging critics at times admit that Thomas Corneille, as a dramatist, is not altogether unskilful, and in looking at the Imperial tragedies and Camma, I have attempted to show in some detail that he is both an exceedingly good constructor of plays - with the occasional lapses normal to any writer - and a plausible creator of characters who, give the situation they find themselves in, manage to convince us, the audience. Some of his more maligned figures, such as Placidie, are less bizarre than is often thought, while his dramaturgical skill elsewhere only serves to make more interesting and credible the characters whom he has drawn from history or invented for the sake of the situation. Other criticisms - that he consigns important details to the intervals, that the dénouements often demand a deus ex machina and so on - have been shown to be largely unfair. The discovery of Commodus' tablets, for example, was sudden enough in the historical accounts, and indeed Thomas attempts to reduce the surprise in his play by attributing their discovery to Flavian's defection.

(The use of Flavian, too, allows the dramatist, for reasons of bienséances, to dispense with the homosexual element present in history's version of the tablet scene.) Thomas Corneille can avoid the obvious: it is thanks to Thermantie principally, not Eucherius, that Honorius is saved in Stilicon, and a subtler meaning is thereby given not only to the play as a whole but to Eucherius' death and Stilicon's remorse. What appears superfluous - Hésione's attempt at stirring up a revolt in Camma, for example - can be explained in strictly practical terms: Sinorix must die off-stage, and does so as he goes to quell the uprising.

From what has been said, it is clear that, at least in his plays up to and including Maximian, Thomas Corneille is both a varied and a serious dramatist, successful much more often than not in creating dramatic situations and plausible characters. He has developed, using his earlier plays as foundations for the later ones and, dare one say it, has perhaps improved. He is not only as good as the best of his contemporaries, he is often better and more imaginative than they are, in advance of their ideas as regards both construction and characterisation. Above all, he can be seen not merely as the imitator of his brother or even as an independent author in his own right but as an obvious forerunner of Racine. And he should, at last, be given due credit for this.

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